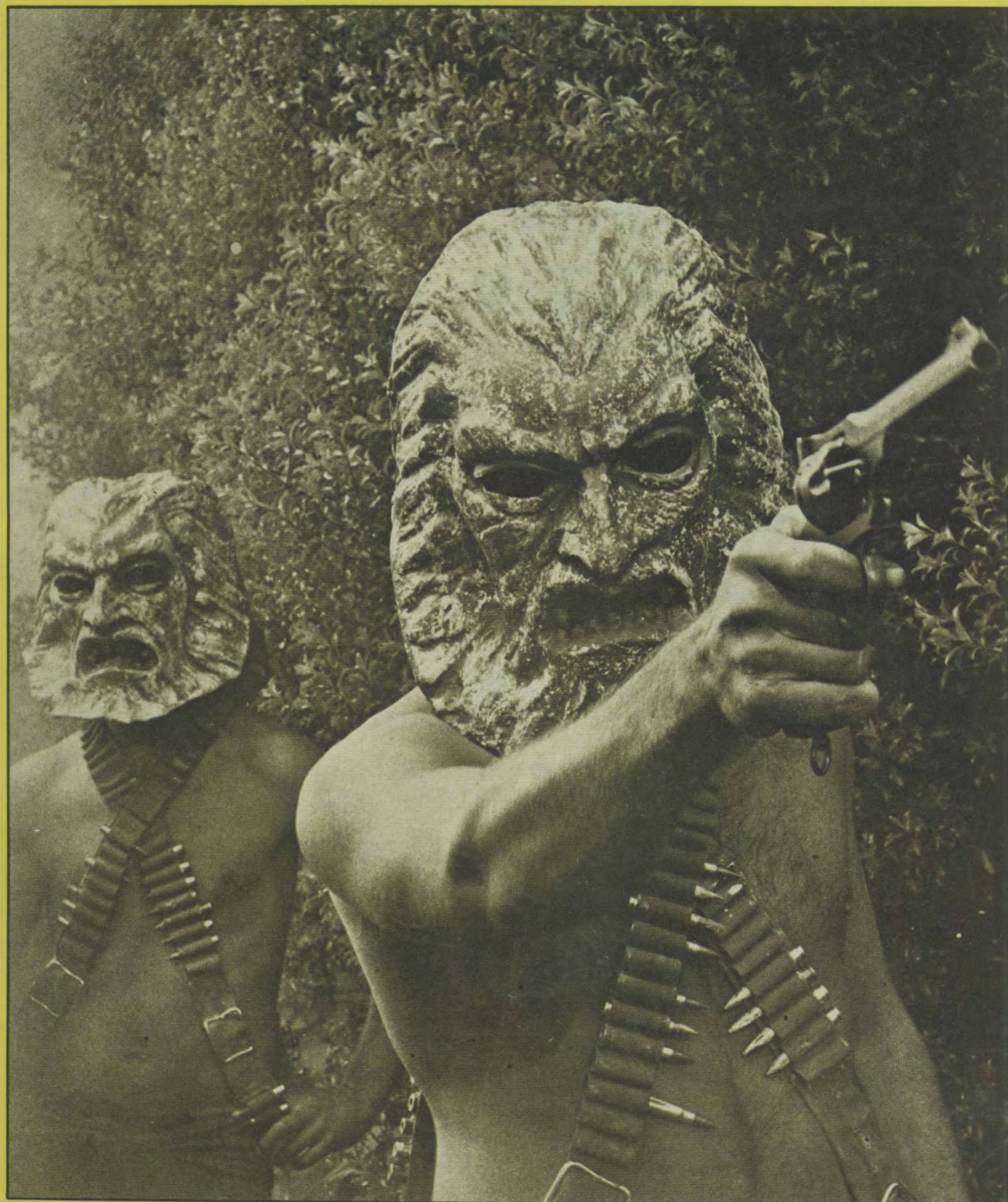


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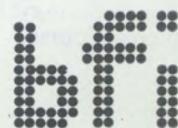
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The London Film Festival is open to the general public and tickets are available at the National Film Theatre from 10 November. Members of the British Film Institute receive advance notification of the Festival programme and can send in their postal bookings at the beginning of November. Full details about both membership and the Festival are available from the Box Office, National Film Theatre, South Bank, Waterloo, London SE1 (Tel 01-928 3232/3) or from the Membership Department, British Film Institute, 81 Dean Street, London W1V 6AA (Tel 01-437 4355).

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AUTUMN 1973

Volume 42 No. 4

SIGHT AND SOUND

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On the cover: John Boorman's 'Zardoz'
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Last Tango in Paris is a disturbing film that causes a lot of arguments. Fury at the disgruntled vulgarities who came to see a *Deep Throat* and want everyone around them to know 'they didn't get their money's worth'. Disagreement with companions who see Brando only as a sexist pig or romantic ideal. Our own confusion when we see the film again and respond to everything differently. These encounters release the powerful emotions evoked by the film, but they also grow out of its richness. Bertolucci's confrontation of the issues is profound; the performances (particularly Brando's) are amazingly authentic; and our own needs and fantasies concerning sex, love and death pull us very strongly into private visions of the film.

One way of understanding the film itself is to see it in the context of Bertolucci's earlier works. The central conflicts in *Last Tango* bear close similarities with those in *The Conformist* (1970), *The Spider's Stratagem* (1969), and *Before the Revolution* (1964). In all these films, one of the central characters is a young person trying to escape from his social class and family background, but who inevitably lives out the values from his past.

Unconventionality is always associated with left-wing politics. In *Before the Revolution*, Fabrizio joins the Communist Party but ultimately rejects it for its imperfections and returns to his bourgeois family. The young hero of *The Spider's Stratagem* is unwillingly drawn into the mystery surrounding the death of his father, who was supposedly assassinated by the Fascists. In trying to avenge the murder, the son's

identity almost merges with that of his father. In *The Conformist*, Marcello Clerici tries to escape his father's insanity and his mother's eccentric decadence. In order to appear 'normal', he joins the Fascist Party; but when Mussolini falls, he renounces the Fascists and retreats into madness like his father. In *Last Tango*, Jeanne, daughter of a French army colonel, delights in shocking her conventional mother with her liberated life style. But later she destroys her outrageous lover and chooses a conventional marriage. In all these cases, the gap between conventionality and rebellion, between outward appearance and inner emotional reality, makes the person frightened and dangerous, particularly to those who love him.

In *Revolution*, *Conformist* and *Last Tango*, each of these characters chooses between a conventional marriage and a dangerous love affair associated with childhood. In rejecting

BERTOLUCCI

AND THE DANCE OF DANGER

Marsha Kinder and Beverle Houston

'Before the Revolution': Adriana Asti, Francesco Barilli

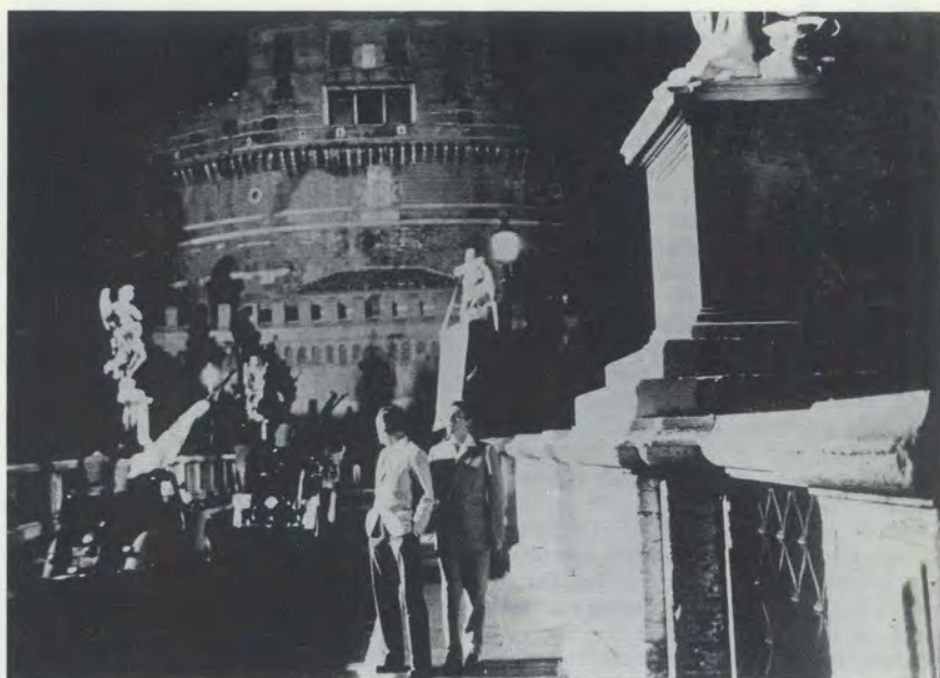


the romantic lover (who is neurotic or deviant by society's norms), and entering the marriage, each destroys the potential for growth and, as if to insure that the decision is final, each destroys the loved one. In *Revolution*, Clelia was destined from childhood to be Fabrizio's bride. He temporarily abandons her for a stormy, incestuous relationship with his aunt Gina, who is neurotic and promiscuous, dislikes adults and tries to remain a child. She is the one who leaves first, but Fabrizio makes the break permanent when he marries. The film ends with the wedding; as the bride and groom drive off, Gina is sobbing and smothering Fabrizio's younger brother with kisses. In *The Conformist*, Marcello marries Julia, a sensuous but shallow member of the middle class, who offers him a superficial respectability. But he really loves Anna, the wife of the liberal professor whom he is trying to assassinate. Marcello visits Anna at her dancing school where she is instructing little girls in ballet, associating her with children. In their final scene, he, like Fabrizio, sits inside a car with the windows rolled up as Anna sobs hysterically outside; Marcello not only rejects her as a lover, but also abandons her to the assassins.

In *Last Tango*, Jeanne must choose between her fiancé Tom, whose passion is focused on directing a film about her and her family, and Paul, a stranger, who insists on knowing nothing about her background or outside life. She meets Paul in an empty room where they play like children and explore the extremes of sexual fantasy. With Tom she can have a 'pop marriage' where the smiling youths, dressed in overalls, work on their relationship as if it were an automobile. But Jeanne acknowledges that love is not pop. For love, 'The workmen go to a secret place, take off their overalls, and become men and women again.' This is what she has experienced with Paul, but when he tries to bring their love outside their secret room, she flees in terror.

Each of the characters has a parallel conflict about a male authority figure—an idealistic father surrogate who arouses ambivalent feelings and is ultimately rejected. This theme is central in *Spider's Stratagem*, where the son tries to discover whether his father was really a traitor or a hero. In *Revolution*, Fabrizio ignores his bourgeois father and idolises Cesare, his childhood teacher. Unlike Fabrizio, Cesare combines his communist ideology with humanity and realism. When Fabrizio abandons the Party and his youthful idealism to marry Clelia, the wedding scene is intercut with shots of Cesare reading from *Moby Dick* to a class of small children. It is the passage describing Ahab's obsessive pursuit of the white whale—the kind of mad but courageous journey on which the Brando character is embarked. But Cesare is an Ishmael, not an Ahab.

In *The Conformist*, Cesare is transformed into Quadri, the idealistic left-wing philosophy professor who has fled Fascist Italy and settled in Paris. Marcello had been one of his best students, doing his thesis on Plato's allegory of the cave. But he has rejected Quadri and adopted as his new guide Montanari, a Fascist whose physical blindness reinforces Quadri's interpretation that the Italians now see only shadows instead of the truth. On his way to the assassination, Marcello describes a dream in



'The Conformist': Marcello (Trintignant) and Montanari (José Quaglio)

which, after having his eyesight restored by the professor, Marcello runs off with Quadri's wife (a reversal of the plot of *Oedipus*). Relating to Quadri as a father implies that Marcello's relationship with Anna is incestuous (as was the relationship between Fabrizio and Gina in *Revolution* and the potential sex between the son and his father's mistress in *Spider's Stratagem*). Instead of enacting this dream, Marcello watches Quadri and his wife being murdered, explicitly linking the rejections of the true love and idealistic father (only implicit in *Revolution*).

In *Last Tango*, the lover and surrogate father become the same person. Paul is old enough to be Jeanne's father; in the secret room she returns to her childhood where she can live out her incestuous desires. When she says of her father: 'The Colonel—I loved him like a God,' Paul shouts, 'What a steaming pile of bullshit. All uniforms are

bullshit. Everything outside this room is bullshit.' But later, when he chases her to her parents' apartment, he puts on her father's military cap (simultaneously mocking his memory and embodying him) and clowningly says: 'How do you like your hero? Over easy or sunny side up?' She responds by killing him with her father's army pistol. Earlier, when she tried on the same cap and looked like Shirley Temple in *The Littlest Rebel*, she had said: 'How heavy it was when father taught me how to shoot it.' It is doubly heavy when she finally puts the gun to use.

In all the films the sexual and political conflict is expressed in a brilliant dance sequence where romantic joy and conventional sterility are polarised. In *Before the Revolution* Gina and Fabrizio, who have just become lovers, are celebrating Easter Sunday in the bosom of their bourgeois family. The lovers begin to dance, and

'Before the Revolution': Fabrizio (Francesco Barilli) and Cesare (Morando Morandini)



finally kiss. The extraordinary eroticism of the scene is achieved by drawing us into their intense feelings, expressed in the music and the subtle detail of their faces, revealed through the lingering close-up. The excitement is heightened by the unseeing presence of the family, who have overreached and are easing into somnolence. The father looks up briefly from his newspaper, momentarily aware, but lapses back into unconcern; the grandmother naps, her mouth agape. When Fabrizio's younger brother enters, his childish face registers awareness of the atmosphere generated by the lovers; Gina brings him into the dance, foreshadowing the film's ending. *Spider's Stratagem* presents a dance sequence which is the setting for one of the key flashbacks. The father, at his most heroically romantic moment, mocks the Fascists with his bold moves on the dance floor. In *The Conformist* the contrast is between the tight, controlled machinations of Marcello and his Fascist accomplice and the open, sweeping enchantment of the dance created by the two beautifully clad women. Even the bourgeois Julia is transformed, shouting 'This is Paris . . . I'm a New Woman.' But in *Last Tango* the forces of sterility are represented by the tango dancers, as they snap into ritualised postures and stylised grimaces to compete for a prize dispensed by the bourgeois establishment. It is in this context that Paul offers Jeanne a commitment of an older style, but his behaviour clearly shows that whatever he shares with the past, it is not the deadness. Although she is rejecting him, he succeeds in drawing her into the dance, which is their last fling of childlike, playful spontaneity. He carries her piggy-back and wiggles his ass defiantly at the outraged lady judge, who tells him, 'It's a contest. Where does love fit in? Go to the movies to see love!'

While all the films share an elaborately textured style, they also imply that style must express the politics of society and emotion in order to transcend an empty formalism. In *Revolution*, this point is made explicitly. When his friend Agostino is in the grips of suicidal despair, Fabrizio urges him to see *Red River*, as if a good movie were all he needed. Later, when he is suffering as a result of Gina's infidelity, Fabrizio goes to see Godard's *Une Femme est une Femme*, and encounters a film buff who insists that Nicholas Ray's 360 degree pan is a 'moral fact', and that it is 'impossible to live without Rossellini'. The weakness that results from Fabrizio's bloodless idealism is contrasted with the boldness of Bertolucci's own style.

Only 23 when he made this film, Bertolucci was able to integrate influences from Rossellini, Antonioni, and especially Godard, into a personal style marked by experimentation. Sometimes the results are gimmicky, as in the shift to colour in the *camera obscura* sequence, and the looped embrace between Fabrizio and Gina. But usually the innovations are effective vehicles for important ideas and feelings. In the lyric sequence at the riverside, the sweeping camera movement, greyed tones and romantic music powerfully express the sadness and beauty of Puck's feelings, which Fabrizio so callously discounts. The brilliant opera sequence, juxtaposed with the workers'



Dance sequence in 'The Spider's Stratagem'

parade, begins in a kind of satiric *cinéma vérité* with the arrival of the socialites. Inside the auditorium, the characters are seated according to social class. The music starts to build, preparing us for the powerful emotions soon to be experienced. When Gina's eyes meet Fabrizio's, the camera suddenly zooms back and pans round the opera house, dizzying us with the impact of her feelings. The opera house is also the location for the assassination and its reenactment in *Spider's Stratagem*. But in the surrealistic scene where the townspeople sit in the square listening raptly to the opera being piped out to them, the aesthetic passion of these art lovers contrasts ironically with the cowardice and treachery that marked their behaviour under Mussolini.

In *The Conformist* the dazzling compositions and visual effects seem to comment on the concern for surface beauty; which parallels Marcello's desire for the appearance of normalcy. Thus Bertolucci uses empty visuals in order to mock empty visuals, ironically making them meaningful after all. In many scenes, the drama is played out against a background that is fascinating to watch, but which has little inherent relationship to what is going on. When Marcello gives Manganiello information for planning Quadri's assassination, they are standing in the busy kitchen of a Chinese restaurant. And if that weren't enough to distract our attention, a bright light swings back and forth on the left side of the screen. In the sequence where Julia and Marcello make love, the landscapes flash by, tinted blue and gold like a romantic backdrop; dreamlike, the reflected images are superimposed on their bodies. But ironically, all this romance decorates a vicarious eroticism that results from Julia telling how she was seduced by the fat lawyer Perpuccio; further, Marcello does not love her, but has chosen her coldly, to enhance his apparent normality. Perhaps most bitterly ironic is the contrast between the bloody assassination and the romantic, hazy, snow-covered landscape in which it takes place. The film abounds with these self-mocking, dazzling visuals.

Although *Last Tango* also has a highly controlled visual surface and many of the same images as *The Conformist*—the elevated train, the frosted glass, the Hotel d'Orsay, the façades of Paris buildings, and images flashing through the windows of a moving train—the style is less self-consciously dazzling. The visuals enhance the romantic tone surrounding Jeanne and Paul rather

than deflate or distract from its emotional impact. The stylistic parody is located primarily in the character of Tom the filmmaker, played by Jean-Pierre Léaud, the actor used by Truffaut for autobiographical roles and by Godard in *La Chinoise* for the pseudo-revolutionary leader of the Rosa Luxemburg theatrical cell, who act out their political fantasies within the confines of an apartment. (Tom tells Jeanne he wants to name their daughter Rose for Rosa Luxemburg.)

Linked to the film buff in *Before the Revolution*, Tom is constantly translating real life into aesthetic principle. In contrast to the Brando character, Tom is aroused to passion and violence only when Jeanne threatens to withdraw from his movie. Pretending to himself that he is doing *cinéma vérité*, he actually needs to stage and control every movement and speech. He cannot conduct his romance without the help of film allusions. When he proposes to Jeanne, a life preserver marked *L'Atalante* (the name of the Vigo film in which marriage is seen as a trap) is knocked into the water, and promptly sinks. As she models her wedding gown, he rhapsodises as he dances into the rain: 'You're better than Rita Hayworth and Kim Novak . . . than Ava Gardner when she loved Mickey Rooney.' Meanwhile, he has failed to notice that Jeanne has disappeared. As part of Paul's playfulness, he also alludes to movies. When Jeanne is about to reject him, he quips, 'Quo vadis, baby,' and later does a Cagney imitation. In their final encounter, he echoes the cliché line, 'It's the title shot, baby, we're going all the way.' Unlike Tom, who gets so caught up in the films that he loses touch with what is going on around him, Paul always transforms the allusion to a personal statement that expresses the dynamics of the specific context.

At worst, Tom offers a modern counterpart to the grotesque tango—a denial of love and spontaneity in the service of a sterile and ritualised art. At best, he offers a possibility for Jeanne that focuses on herself. Though he manipulates her into remembering her past, he gives her the gift of genuine recollections from her childhood. He rejects the apartment because it is too old and sad, the same reasons she uses in rejecting the tango ballroom. He wants to become adult, but in a creative way, saying that they must 'invent gestures and words'. He mocks his own inadequacies by defining adulthood: 'Adults are serious, logical, circumspect, hairy; they face problems,' and by admitting that his film has failed to fulfil his vision. Though his own pompous style and limitations make him ridiculous in comparison to Paul, Tom has not systematically denied the identity and needs of Jeanne as a whole human being. Yet in the Métro fight she accuses him of the very same things of which Paul is eminently guilty: 'You make me do things I've never done, you take advantage of me, you steal my time, you make me do what you want, I'm tired of having my mind raped, the film is over.'

Bertolucci develops this contrast early in the film. After Jeanne has totally abandoned herself to Paul at their first encounter, she runs to meet Tom at the station. Outraged at the presence of the film crew and his announcement that he is shooting a film for TV, she snaps: 'You should have asked my permission.' Jeanne is able to deny Tom's

control because it is concerned largely with his art. But with Paul, her whole being is tyrannised in a way that activates her deepest fantasies. Thus the pop battle in the subway provides a kind of comic rehearsal for the deadly earnest showdown in the apartment.

Despite its close similarities to the other films, *Last Tango in Paris* is a unique artifact—significant in its aesthetic innovation, and almost overwhelming in its emotional intensity. Perhaps the most important reason for this heightened power is the conception and development of the Brando character. Whereas the other films centred on the young men who had to choose between the romantic and the conventional, this film focuses on the exotic, dangerous lover (this time a man). In *Last Tango*, the opening shot confronts us with Brando at the moment of peak intensity, reeling with despair after the bloody suicide of his wife. Drawn to him like a magnet, the camera zooms in for a tight close-up of his face. This strange, intense figure also arouses the curiosity of the young girl passing by. Thus the opening shots establish that in this film Bertolucci will explore the extraordinary pull inherent in the romantic fantasy, far stronger in Paul than in Gina or Anna.

The power of the dream embodied in Brando results partly from the depth of experience and passion in both the character and the performance, giving Paul the symbolic resonance of an archetypal figure. Paul is old. His forty-five years have brought him full measure of suffering and humiliation; his hair is thinning and his waistline growing thick. Jeanne is young and naive; in the opening scene, she telephones her mother to report that she is about to rent her first apartment. When she tries to get the key, the black concierge warns her: 'The key has disappeared. Many strange things happen . . . I'm afraid of the rats.' Laughing wickedly, she says: 'You're very young, right?' Like a prophet, the black woman knows the truth, but tells it with a touch of

madness. Jeanne hears the madness, but denies the truth.

The age difference is mirrored in the choice of players. Brando is the veteran actor in the middle of a comeback; Maria Schneider is making her film debut and holding her own. Within the film, the great difference in their experience is expressed in two recollections of childhood. Though Jeanne is charmed by her early essay on cows, it is merely a dictionary exercise, like those concerning 'menstruation' and 'penis'. Paul recounts the time his father forced him to milk the cows before taking a girl to a basketball game; in the car, he suffers from exquisite humiliation when he finds that his shoes smell from cowshit.

Jeanne, like Tom, has grown up in the conventional, fairly rigid class structure of French society. Their superficial rebellion is modelled after American pop culture. But Paul goes back to an earlier American tradition of rebellious individualism. Like Ahab, he has travelled the world, pursuing his vision in the face of repeated defeat and disaster. This pattern of dangerous self-fulfilment is loved by Americans even in cartoons, where creatures are dismembered or exploded, only to get right up and begin again. Perhaps this is the American comic vision of Sisyphus; since we must continue struggling, we might as well glorify the effort. In the bathtub scene, when Jeanne tells Paul that she has fallen in love, he makes a speech that is at the centre of this vision.

PAUL: Is this man going to love you, build a fortress to protect you so you don't ever have to be afraid, lonely, or empty? Well, you'll never make it. . . . It won't be long before he wants you to make a fortress of your tits and your smile and the way you smell till he feels secure enough and can worship in front of the altar of his own prick. You're alone, you're all alone, and you won't be free of that feeling

until you look death in the face . . . you have to go up the ass-hole of death, into the womb of fear. You won't be able to find him until you do that.

JEANNE: But I've found him—it's you. You're that man.

PAUL: Get me the scissors . . . I want you to put your fingers up my ass.

Although Paul begins by cynically denying love, he ends up affirming that it is possible—but only if one goes to the extremes of experience. Jeanne is understandably frightened by this vision, but at the same time she is drawn into the fantasy of total commitment. Through this ritual act, Paul engages Jeanne in his pursuit, as Ahab initiated his crew (the very passage read by Cesare in *Revolution*). Paul becomes her Moby Dick, but she is finally able to destroy her demon and escape from his power, allying herself to Tom, the Ishmael figure who records the story but can't get it all told.

Paul is a protean hero who undergoes many transformations on his quest. Originally Bertolucci sought Jean-Louis Trintignant for the role; though he is a fine actor, he could not have brought the richness of implication evolving out of Brando's past performances. We learn that Paul has been a boxer, like Brando in *On the Waterfront* where he laments: 'I could've been a contender'; in *Last Tango*, even though he loses, he makes it to the 'title shot'. Paul has also been a revolutionary in South America, evoking Brando's role as Zapata; Paul then went to an island in the Pacific and later was a journalist in Japan, reminding us of Brando's adventures in making *Mutiny on the Bounty*, and his roles in *Teahouse of the August Moon* and *Sayonara*. Paul has also been a bongo player and actor, linking him with Brando's personal life. Finally, Paul went to France where he married a Frenchwoman and lived on her money, the fictional situation unique to this film.

Left: Jean-Louis Trintignant in 'The Conformist'; right, Brando, the non-conformist, in 'Last Tango'



At the last Academy Awards, in a brief homage to the movie hero, the film clips moved from Valentino, the master of the tango, to Brando as Stanley (in *A Streetcar Named Desire*) and as Zapata, combining the heroic forces of sexuality and rebelliousness which are central to his role in *Last Tango*. Ironically, Brando was offered the Oscar for his portrayal of corrupt power in *The Godfather*. Perhaps his refusal was 'cutting through the bullshit' in the spirit of the hero he has come to represent in some of his finest performances—*The Wild One*, *On the Waterfront*, *Viva Zapata!*, *Streetcar*, *One-Eyed Jacks* and *Last Tango*. In this way, then, Paul's character and Brando's performance epitomise the American dream of romantic heroism developed through the history of our cinema, and reiterated in Brando's own career.

Bertolucci strengthens the elemental appeal of the Brando character through the style of the film. In contrast to the earlier movies, *Last Tango* is developed through a relatively simple linear narrative, alternating between scenes of Paul and Jeanne in their secret space and shots of their lives in the complex city outside. An element of circularity helps to intensify the experience. Between Jeanne's discovery that Paul has abandoned the apartment and the tango sequence, many scenes from the opening encounter are repeated, but in reversed order: Jeanne alone in the room, her encounter with the black concierge, Jeanne walking outside the building, Jeanne phoning Tom from the booth where she earlier called her mother, her meeting in the room with Tom (whom she tries to substitute for Paul) and her reunion with Paul under the bridge where they first met. In the apartment, Tom tells her that his film is finished. 'I don't like things to finish. You should start something else right away.' In the next scene on the bridge when she tells Paul their relationship is over, he insists: 'It's over and then it begins again.'

This circular view of experience, in which new relationships merely repeat earlier encounters, is reinforced when we learn that Jeanne's first love was also named Paul, when Paul calls her Rose as she flees from the ballroom, and when Tom suggests to Jeanne that they name their daughter Rose. Perhaps Jeanne fears that Rosa's fate prophesies her own future: both women are trying to escape the stifling influence of a bourgeois mother; both are drawn into intense sexuality with strangers in the confines of a secret room; both are loved by two men; both help to destroy Paul who loves them. In the brilliant scene where Paul visits Marcel, his wife's lover, he discovers that Rosa had bought them the same bathrobes, and realises that she was trying to recreate another version of their relationship.

The fast movement and richly textured surface of the earlier films give way to other visual values. Nearly half of *Last Tango* takes place in the almost empty space of the apartment, which heightens the significance and intensity of what we are allowed to see. Within the apartment, the screen is filled with enormous close-ups of Jeanne and Paul, often bathed in golden light. Like the Francis Bacon paintings in the titles, the characters frequently appear alone in the

empty space.

While Brando recounts the painful memories of his childhood, the camera remains fixed on an enormous close-up of his face, relying entirely on the emotional play of his features. Nothing changes except the light values as Jeanne moves between him and the window; the static camera affirms his humanity as a rich source of visual value. In one of the scenes where their playfulness and intimacy are most appealing, the camera cuts to an extreme close-up of their heads and shoulders as they embrace and look at each other tenderly. When Paul says, 'Now let's just look at each other,' the camera obeys, gradually drawing back to reveal their naked bodies, entwined as they face each other. When Paul carries Jeanne through the apartment in her rain-soaked wedding dress, the shadows of the rain on the walls create subtle, flickering changes in the light. The light continues to shimmer as it reflects off the water in the bathtub scene a few minutes later. This soft, glowing light enhances the romantic quality of their relationship, but contrasts ironically with the ugly, bitter realities that he forces her to face throughout this sequence.

Outside the apartment, the camera is equally capable of conveying emotional intensity. In the first encounter between Paul and his mother-in-law, the subtle camerawork reveals the fluid movement between extremes of hostile distance and emotional sympathy. The sequence opens with the image of a pile of sheets, then cuts to unidentified hands rummaging through shelves filled with objects and then to a huge silhouette of Brando's profile. When the two figures are finally seen in the same frame, they are separated by a wide space. The camera moves in for a tighter shot of the empty space, eliminating both figures and focusing on the 'Privé' sign on the door. The woman is first to enter the frame; then Brando steps into the image and embraces her. After this contact, we see a close-up of his fingers tapping on the table, then a huge close-up of his face, revealing that he has withdrawn once more into emotional distance; the next cut reveals the woman alone in the frame. Before any dialogue can identify this woman as his dead wife's mother, searching for a clue to the suicide, the emotional dynamics have already been expressed through the visuals.

The camera's handling of space to reveal states of being is also effective in the extraordinary scene between Brando and his wife's corpse. It opens with Paul entering the darkened room; while we can just see flowers on the left side of the screen, the camera stays on the right, concealing the room's other occupant. As he spurts out his anger ('You look ridiculous in that make-up, like a caricature of a whore!') the camera begins to move to the left, revealing more of the flowers, hinting at the bed's occupant. Only as his anger changes to grief does the camera arrive at the face of Rosa. Unlike those of the earlier films, these subtle camera techniques do not call attention to themselves, heightening our emotional response without creating an aesthetic distance that would be inappropriate in the scenes involving Paul.

Outside the apartment, cars, people and trains rush by, from all directions and at

many levels; lighting is naturalistic or harsh, emphasising the fantasy quality of the interior scenes. Moving trains are always associated with extreme action and danger. In the opening scene Brando's despairing scream merges into the sound of the train passing overhead. After their first frantic sexual encounter Paul and Jeanne return to the street like strangers, going their separate ways, as the train again passes over them. Later, when Paul buggers her and makes her repeat an obscene litany, her cries merge with the sound of a train, as the camera cuts outside briefly to the rushing elevated (the only time in the film that the outside world intrudes into their secret room). In the Métro, through the windows of the passing subway cars, we see Tom and Jeanne fighting, just as in the final desperate chase we see, through the windows of passing automobiles, Paul pursuing Jeanne. The chase takes on symbolic dimensions as we are reminded of the opening shots of *Before the Revolution*, where Fabrizio is running madly through the streets of Parma to see a woman.

The camerawork and situation also evoke films from the French New Wave, especially the last scene of *Breathless*, where Belmondo is betrayed by the woman he loves (an American) and is gunned down as he runs through the Paris streets. This fast-paced style is close to that used by Tom's film crew. Bertolucci parodies their efforts to capture exuberance and spontaneity as a crewman spins around wildly, trying to point the camera at Jeanne's old nurse, who has just made an inconsequential remark; instead, his camera lights on a beribboned portrait of de Gaulle. In the tango sequence, the fast cutting also creates a sense of mockery by emphasising the mechanical movements of the dancers.

Certain recurring images unite the worlds within and outside the apartment. Throughout the film, doors are opening into new experience or slamming shut in anger. Bertolucci is fascinated by frosted glass, which he uses to soften and romanticise, to distort, and to separate characters and settings. At key moments Jeanne must ride in a cage-like elevator. When she first looks at the apartment, the mood is ominous and the elevator gothic as it ascends out of camera range. When she tells her mother she is going to marry Tom, she mischievously escapes in the elevator as her mother and the camera look down with curiosity. After fleeing from Tom, Jeanne hides behind the elevator to wait for Paul, who tap-dances his way into the cage. In the final scene the desperate chase ends with the dizzying movements of a hand-held camera tracking Paul as he runs up the spiral staircase after Jeanne, who is fleeing from him in the elevator. The great variety of angles and tones makes it difficult to identify which is the real trap—the marriage with Tom or the love affair with Paul. This ambiguity is also visually expressed in the recurring image of the mysterious draped form in the smaller room of the apartment. After Paul has moved out, Jeanne vents her anger by pulling off the drape, discovering that what lies beneath is only a pile of junk.

The music also has a unifying function. Unlike the earlier films, which combined jazz, pop, classical and opera, *Last Tango*

relies primarily on jazz saxophone music, composed and played by Gato Barbieri. The jazz is identified with Paul's values. Like the black concierge, the musicians are in touch with the kind of intense pain and suffering that Paul has experienced. An amateur at bongos and harmonica, Paul gets along with the musicians who stay in his hotel, but his bourgeois mother-in-law is threatened by their music and wants to make it stop. Like the close-ups and the film's simple structure, the unified music allows for an intense exploration within a very specific area of experience. When a shift in the music does occur, the contrast is all the more emphatic; as in the tango sequence, which presents a world from another era.

Another source of the film's intensity is the extraordinary handling of sex and death. Inside the room, sex is not merely the repetition of well-known steps (like the tango), but a genuine exploration, probing into every secret corner of mind and body. But at another level, the sex is not free, at least for Jeanne, because Paul is always in control. Though she has the power to come to the room when she chooses, once there, she seems always ready for sex; but it is Paul who dictates when and how. As their game confirms, she's Little Red Riding Hood and he's the Big Bad Wolf waiting to gobble her up. He orders her about: 'Get the butter,' 'Get the scissors,' and finally: 'I'm going to have a pig fuck you and vomit in your face, and you're going to swallow the vomit. Are you going to do that for me?' She submits adoringly: 'Yes, and more than that.'

He's the one who lays down the rules; then he wants to change them. When they first meet in the apartment and the phone rings, she asks: 'Do I answer it or not?', establishing that she expects him to take over. This sado-masochistic sexuality reflects a dominant pattern in male-female relationships throughout the culture. The film explores a woman's attempt to escape it when her own pull toward it is very strong. Even though he can't relinquish his aggressive dominance, Paul tries to transcend the machismo of his 'whorefucker, barfighter, super-masculine' father and combine sex with love. Sex has been a survival technique for Paul (as it was with Gina), combating his despair and death wish; but it moves him towards a fuller commitment.

Last Tango is as much about death as about sex, linking these two forces at the centre of human behaviour. In *Revolution*, Gina, like Jeanne, has lost her father; Agostino's suicide is parallel to Rosa's, but death was never central in the earlier film. In *Spider's Stratagem*, the main question is whether the father's death was suicide or murder. Suicide is also an ambiguous possibility for Anna in *The Conformist*, who decides to travel with her husband, and for Paul, who promises his wife's corpse that he, too, can find a way to death. In *The Conformist*, Marcello, like Jeanne, strikes a pose with a gun. These playful killers mock our naive image of the gun, learned from movie gangsters, cowboys and aristocratic duellists. In both films, death is dealt by someone who has sought identity from the outside, who does not have an autonomous centre. But in *Last Tango*, Paul is offering the vision that in order to live and love, one must look directly into the face of death.

When the movie's over, two questions haunt us. Why does he try to move their love outside the room? And, why does she shoot him? Paul's offer of love can be seen in a variety of ways. He is a sadistic chauvinist who wants to extend his control over her in order to possess her entirely. He is a crazy masochist with a record of humiliations who wants to fail again. In pursuing her for the first time, he actually gives up control, perhaps in search of a way to die. He is a romantic dreamer who has bought the fantasy of ecstatic oneness, despite all the evidence of his past experience and acknowledgment to Rosa's corpse that: 'Even if a husband lives two hundred fucking years, he's never going to understand his wife's nature.' He is a courageous idealist, always willing to try again, no matter how many times he's failed, because love is the only thing that makes life meaningful. He is willing to take any risk, because it's the only way of growing. Each identity is true; each is partial. But his vision of love must be lived out with a woman like Jeanne, whose limitations preclude the success of the brave dream.

grieves at the loss, but is angry because he has the power to end things and she does not. Earlier, when she came to him in her wedding dress, she humbly confessed: 'Forgive me. I wanted to leave you, and I couldn't. Do you still want me?' Finally, her intuition tells her that Paul is a woman-hater. She's righter than she knows, because his interactions with his mother-in-law, the hotel maid and the prostitute, as well as the fact of his wife's suicide, lend supporting evidence. Because her fantasies are not bound up with Tom's, she can resist his foolish attempts at control. But with Paul, like a trapped animal, she must kill her way out for survival and autonomy.

Her final act can also be seen as fear of risk-taking and involvement, a cowardice that Paul has recognised all along. When he first dictates the rules for their meetings in the room, he asks, 'Are you scared?' and she lies: 'No.' Later he tells her: 'You're always afraid.' When she describes the man she loves, she stresses his mystery and potency, but once outside the room, Paul becomes a vulnerable middle-aged man with a broken-down hotel, instead of a glamorous American



'Last Tango in Paris': Marlon Brando, Maria Michi

The final question remains: why does she shoot him? In courageous self-defence, or cowardly evasion? As Jeanne well knows, Paul's preoccupation has been with himself. After the intimate scene in which they trade memories of their childhood, he turns away from her to play distractedly with his harmonica. She accuses him: 'Why don't you listen to me? You know it's like talking to the wall. Your solitude weighs on me. Your silence isn't indulgent or generous. You're an egoist . . . I can be by myself too, you know.' While he withdraws further into his private grief, Jeanne lies face down on the mattress and masturbates, then crouches, rocking like a child. Just a few moments before, she had romantically described her childhood experience with her cousin Paul, when the two of them masturbated together; but now this defiant attempt to retain her autonomy is sad and lonely. She also hates her helplessness in the face of his control. When Paul abandons the apartment, she

sitting on the floor in the middle of a fantasy. She is afraid of the pain and humiliation that have brought him to this point; she's too young to take it on. So, she rejects him, despite her promises to endure anything for his sake. When she sees the reality that he is now presenting, she no longer knows him. Thus, in the end, as she stands bewildered, gun in hand, rehearsing her explanation for the police, the strange phrases that she utters are both true and false: 'I don't know who he is. He followed me on the street. He tried to rape me . . . He's a madman . . . I don't know his name. I don't know . . . I don't know who he is.'

All these interpretations of the final acts have validity in the work of art, combining forces that generate its richness and emotional intensity. But as the film's dark vision implies, they are not equally fruitful in life. Trapped in the conventions and fantasies of their culture, Tom is ridiculous, Paul is dead, and Jeanne is a killer. ■

AKENFIELD



Gareth Jones

'Her name isn't really Mrs. Groat, is it?' asked Rex Pyke, producer of *Akenfield*, having just run back to camera for the tenth time that morning over an expansive Suffolk field. On being told yes, that was the actress' name, he responded, 'Oh, I thought that was the name of the character.'

A telling interchange: Mrs. Groat really is Mrs. Groat because there is not a professional actor in the film. The screenplay, written by Ronald Blythe, derives from his book *Akenfield*, a documentary microcosm of rural life in this country which uses as its framework a series of taped interviews with the inhabitants of a single Suffolk village; in the film, the people of East Suffolk are being asked to play themselves. 'A feature made like a documentary,' is how Peter Hall, now directing, described it in 1970* when it was still an unfinanced project. Pyke is running back and forth across the farmer's peas to re-instruct the actors because loud-hailers are not being used. Though *Akenfield* is a 35mm widescreen feature with a cast of 150 and period settings from the 1890s onwards, it is being made with a strictly functional economy of means and manpower, and a maximum of individual involvement—hence the absence of loud-hailers. The pervasive, almost pioneering spirit of co-operation on the film is undoubtedly stimulated by the knowledge that here for once a worthwhile project is actually off the ground, that it is not costing a penny more than its basic budget requirements, and that (like almost all the dozen or so films of lasting value completed in this country in the past decade) it is being made despite rather than because of the existing film establishment.

The crew is a young one, and with the exception of veteran sound man Peter Handford most people are doing their jobs for the first time on a feature production. The cameraman, Ivan Strasburg, was focus-puller on *Family Life*; the wardrobe and make-up team have come in from television; and the art direction has been taken over by two props supervisors who have got hold of almost everything necessary for the film by begging, borrowing and hiring cheaply in the Suffolk locality. Research into locations and casting was taken on by Ronald Blythe himself.

A lorry carrying 20 tons of gravel roars past up the 'B' road adjacent to the location. Meanwhile Mrs. Groat, dressed in a paradoxically dignified Victorian peasant's costume, and three kids in tatters are laboriously gathering flints into baskets. At the turn of the century workers were paid 2s. for every 24 bushels they collected, and the flints were used by each parish for mending the roads. It would take a day to earn 2s. In the dance-hall scene shot the following day, the extras earned a nominal £1 each for seven hours' work—the difference being that in this case they wanted to do it.

Peter Hall directs his cast without the use of scripted dialogue: 'controlled improvisation'* is the name he gives it. He much admires Bresson, but there is no similarity of approach here beyond the use of non-actors. During the shooting of a scene he keeps the camera running, playing through, then repeating and re-repeating the action and the verbal sense of the scene in an uninterrupted series of permutations. The actors, selected by improvisation tests, have been briefed in what they say but not in how they should say it. By calling them in when they least expect it, unemphatically and without exhortation, he creates—after the initial tensions—a relaxed flow of interchanges in which time and again moments of genuine

spontaneity occur. These moments, one suspects, are when the Suffolk people will seem closest to their ancestors. Judging by his previous work, Hall is not a born filmmaker; but in relying upon his unquestioned ability with actors, and in taking this undogmatic, rabbit-from-hat approach, he is getting extempore effects which are vitally close to the individuals' own reactions.

The production had come up with an expected handful of 'naturals', the most notable being a pig-farmer who left a little early the day I was there in order to tend his stock. During his first take in the dance-hall scene, set during the Second World War, I was in a room adjoining the hall. Three old dears in print dresses and immaculate 1940s hairstyles filled the doorway, peering out nervously towards the shooting area. The dancers were motionless for the take, in which the farmer discussed with a young man at the bar wartime problems for agriculture. His rolling dialect droned on for a good five minutes, and the old ladies got into difficulty, their eyes watering, bursting to laugh. During that time there was not a pause or repetition. When the camera stopped turning the hundred and fifty onlookers, somewhat awed, gave him a round of applause.

In a satisfying kind of symmetry, and with typical economy, the casting of the film echoes its theme. *Akenfield* presents a view of the underlying continuity of rural life, and the same set of actors have been cast as, in effect, themselves, their fathers and their fathers' fathers. Ronald Blythe is emphatic in describing himself as a poet; but, he adds, the sociology of *Akenfield* is none the less accurate. The very Elizabethan achievement of his book, which may account for its combined popular and academic success, is to have fused poetry and sociology without compromising either. In adapting material from the book to the screen, he has put

*All quotations come from 'The Crisis We Deserve', SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn, 1970.

stronger emphasis on the 'poetic' concept of the essential continuity beneath all the changes in country living standards and styles over the past eighty years. Shooting is taking place throughout the seasons—at weekends, because of the money. The same locations are visited in each but at different periods; birth and death, spring and winter, are presented in an archetypal balance. It will come as no surprise to find that the finished film has a definite structure. Hall, a Suffolk man himself, commented that a first reading of the script evoked memories of his own grandfather, and that what most drew him to the project was its powerful suggestion of the passage of time and the interrelation of the generations.

For Rex Pyke, *Akenfield* is the kind of film he had dreamed of making at school but had never come near until now. An editor, who has collaborated previously with Hall, Jonathan Miller and Cy Enfield and worked on a lot of big, dull American productions, he has not before produced a feature. He is also cutting *Akenfield*, and his editing bench and producer's desk are both installed on the ground floor of his house—which is about as close as one can get to a cottage film industry.

'People don't realise,' Pyke said, overstating to make the point, 'that all you need to shoot a feature is a camera and a roll of film.' Kevin Brownlow wrote in 1970 that 'a feature film can be made by a crew of five or six. But you risk being blacklisted if you try it.'* Peter Hall, who refers to *Akenfield* as a home movie, evoked a scene during the making of *Perfect Friday* in which eight people were working while another 75 fully paid crew members were sitting drinking coffee. The vast, crumbling structure of the film industry is roped in against its final collapse by a complex of restrictions on the system of production; and the absurd situation continues in which one is more likely to sell a mediocre script that is expensive to make than a potentially creative project which could be finished for a third of the cost of a *Carry On* comedy. The union, says Pyke, still thinks that a small film made as much for love as for money is some kind of threat—failing to take into account that its creative technicians, while they may be working for minimum wages, are at least still working.

Unlike Brownlow and Mollo with *Comrade Jacob*, Pyke has managed to get this film off the ground 'within' the industry. But one wonders how much more the *Akenfield* team might have been able to put into their films if they had not had to spend ninety per cent of their time fighting tooth and nail in a variety of offices for the right to make them at all. It is three years since Peter Hall announced his plans to film *Akenfield*; in creative terms there was no reason why he should not have started then. The fact that he has persisted is impressive, but that the film is being made at all, and on its makers' terms, is little short of a miracle. Had the rights gone to the wrong people, the book might by now have been expensively vulgarised for the boredom of the 'family audience'. One would-be purchaser told Ronald Blythe that they 'might be able to get Jon Voight if we re-set it in New England.'

Admittedly there were a number of

positive determining factors for this production. *Akenfield* the book is popular, and this resulted in private support to the tune of £20,000; another £40,000 came from London Weekend Television, which has previously made use of Peter Hall's name but not, until now, his services. By deferring payments to director, producer, screenwriter and crew, all of whom are working for the minimum union rate, and investing this money in the production, the nominal capital was boosted to £120,000. (In fact the final budgeting cost of *Akenfield* will be £60,000. It is instructive to compare this figure with that of *Kes*, itself a small and renegade production which was completed for £157,000.)

Angle Films, the company formed under corporate ownership for the duration of the film, is using the facilities of the National Film Trustee Company, a branch of the NFFC, who are acting as their 'bankers'. If *Akenfield* makes a profit the NFFC will handle repayments to investors and there will be no order of preference: clapper-boy, producer and private investor will all get their cuts in parallel. Indeed, the viability of *Akenfield's* small budget is due in large measure to the fact that its makers are also its producers. To quote Peter Hall again, 'I don't want a profit participation in a picture when I know that I shall only get a cut after the overheads of an enormous company have been paid.'* *Akenfield* has no enormous company controlling it and its overheads are negligible. The money is being put on the screen—carefully. Pyke's comment was this: 'We are making *Akenfield* for ourselves, working as hard as we want and for what money we want to take out at the time, leaving any balance due to us in the film. There is no difference between management and unit: we are a cooperative. We are all waiting for the film to make the money first.'

LWT's £40,000 constitutes a 'sale' to television, which allows the company the right to two showings. However, on the night of the first TV screening—some time in February, 1974—*Akenfield* will also be receiving an old-fashioned gala première in a West End cinema. *Akenfield* is in no sense a

television film, having been conceived and planned as a cinema feature; it merely has the advantage of the backing of a TV company. The screening will be, as much as anything, an advertisement for the cinema release. Although TV coverage of film extracts is a familiar enough selling device, the screening of a new film in its entirety is unprecedented in this country, and obviously very risky. Pyke takes the view that if the film is good then the TV audience of eight millions will spread the word. And every publicity department in the country will be waiting to see what happens.

In addition to the organisational economies, the film is being shot using a camera technique developed by Hamburg cameraman Wolfgang Trau; another reason for Establishment unease, since what it amounts to is that no lights are being used, even on interior shooting. Worse and worse, reports from Technicolor have confirmed the wisdom of the decision. 'What stock, gauzes, filters and lighting set-ups did you use to get these beautiful monochrome effects?' the labs are asking. The film is being shot on the Techniscope system, whereby the final widescreen image is produced with a camera taking standard (non-anamorphic) objective lenses, and in which the pull-down and aperture plate have been modified to produce a frame image two perforations high, i.e. widescreen-shaped. All 'squeezing' is done at the labs and the cost of negative stock and processing is half that of a regular widescreen system such as CinemaScope.

To all intents and purposes *Akenfield* is an independent film; none of its money comes from orthodox sources, and it is self-produced, using non-actors, cheap local resources and a crew of newcomers. Yet despite the qualms of Establishment onlookers, it is as much a product of the contemporary British film industry—creating as large a turnover in labour terms—as *Father, Dear Father* or *Bequest to the Nation*. The crux, of course, is how good it is. But even at the shooting stage, in its calculated astringency of means and collective commitment, *Akenfield* is an object-lesson for serious feature production in this country. Here we have another alternative route. ■

'Akenfield': photographs by Gareth Jones





WHY THE MOVIE MAJORS ARE MAJOR

David Gordon

Movie buffs tend to be as ignorant about the movie industry as they are knowledgeable about its products. The very word 'product' is one they find distasteful, reminding them as it does of a manufacturing process churning out items for mass consumption. People who love films seem to need to bless the object of their affection with the sacred title of 'art'. In so doing, they set up a whole mythology of how films come to be made which rests on a supposed opposition between art and industry. The directors and writers are the artists, the genuine film-makers, the creators, and they are all on one side of the fence; the movie tycoons, the faceless executives, the studios, capriciously open and shut the golden gate and allow the artists to enter, forcing them to bend their talents to the philistine dictates of the money men. It is commonly assumed that good films are made in spite of the system, by some kind of a trick on a particularly good, or gullible, guard at the golden gate.

One does not have to be a particularly hidebound Marxist to realise that a capitalist world, with profit-motivated corporations, is not going to turn out films which often challenge the basis of that world. But it is dangerous nonsense to see the movie companies as natural enemies of film's creative talent. The major distributors, the old names like MGM, Paramount and the rest, are still responsible for financing the bulk of the moviegoer's diet. They must take a share of the credit for the good films that are honest, true, genuine, and for the good films that are merely entertaining, and a share of the blame for the crap. But most of all, they must be seen to take the credit and the blame; the movie majors are still the dominant force in film production, in film financing, and in distribution. The film companies are important.

This statement of the obvious is long overdue. For too long, the movie buff has been allowed to get away with a version of film's industrial history which is as myth-ridden as the films the 'moguls' were meant to turn out. Very briefly, *Everyone's History of the Film Business* goes as follows: In the beginning there was chaos, and everyone and his immigrant father-in-law owned a nickelodeon and showed one-reelers. Then the Motion Pictures Patent Company moved in and sewed the whole thing up, licensing the users of Edison-based patents. But the Trust simply churned film out by the reel, and sold it by the foot. Showmen, like Adolph Zukor and Carl Laemmle, understood that the public wanted stars, and longer films (which the Europeans had

pioneered), and so managed to bust the Trust—with Government help. In the 1920s, the film companies realised—Adolph Zukor first—that if you owned distributors, there was a much greater chance of your films being shown. And then they realised—Adolph Zukor first—that if you owned the cinemas as well, you were in a really strong position. Thus the movie companies vertically integrated. With a booming audience, they simply turned out films on an assembly line, and used studios (an arty word for a factory) as the most economic way of so doing.

But after the war, in 1948, the Anti-Trust division of the Justice Department finally won a long battle to break the power of the movie majors, and compelled them to

Above: Universal Studios, Hollywood

divorce production and distribution from cinema ownership. At the same time the stars and producers, the package and the packagers, broke away from the studios and asserted their independence by demanding more money for themselves, and declaring themselves independent because they were able to get more money. As television sucked more of the audience away, the studios stupidly thought the way to win them back was to spend more money on films (i.e., give more money to the 'independents'). The power of the studios was broken. Then, during 1969-1971, the studios themselves nearly went broke as a result of having spent too much money trying to photocopy the success of *The Sound of Music* (cost in the late teens of millions of dollars—return \$70m). And now, the major film companies have all been taken over by conglomerates that are more interested in funeral parlours and life assurance than in films, and are no longer of any consequence. New low-budget films made by 'independents' and financed by 'independents' and independently distributed and shown in the new mini-cinemas have replaced the old power houses. A new era has begun since *Easy Rider* and *The Effect of Gamma Rays*, etc. Talent rises, is financed, and is shown to the new stratified audiences in the new stratified picture semi-detached palaces.

Unfortunately, the ending of the above caricature is particularly erroneous. In 1973 and 1974, many of the majors will be celebrating their 50th anniversary. Walt Disney Productions has chosen this year, as it was in 1923 that Walt and Roy signed the Alice Comedies contract. Warner Bros., now Warner Communications, celebrates this year the half century since a Wall Street bank helped it buy Vitagraph. It was in 1924 that Marcus Loew, who had bought Metro in 1920, bought Goldwyn Pictures (from which Sam Goldfish had already exited) and the production unit ran by Louis B. Mayer; MGM became Loew's production and distribution arm serving, among others, the Loew cinemas. The business run by Cohn, Brandt and Cohn adopted the name Columbia Pictures on January 10th, 1924. Universal could celebrate its 50th birthday next year, taking the year that its parent company MCA was founded by Jules Stein, or its 60th birthday, dating from the year that Uncle Carl opened Universal City. Both Paramount and Fox can choose a range of anniversary dates from their confusing beginnings: for example, next year Paramount could rejoice the 40th year since being reorganised after bankruptcy. The movie companies are celebrating their birthdays with joy in their hearts, money in their coffers and, still, muscle in their production and distribution arms.

It is not easy to prove the assertion that the movie companies are still a powerful world movie force. Facts are scarce; the absence of government assistance to the American film industry means that there is no government agency that collects figures on it, and the trade association, the Motion Picture Association of America, is secretive. However, the amount of money taken annually at the box-office in American cinemas is estimated at some \$1.3 billion by the U.S. Commerce Department. Something like two-thirds of that is kept by the

exhibitors, leaving around \$400m to be shared by the distributors. *Variety* does an estimate of the market share of that distributors' gross by the majors, which is shown in the table below. All but 6 per cent of the gross was collected by the majors in 1972—and the share appears to be growing. In 1970, National General, which distributed the films made by Cinema Center, the film-making subsidiary of the CBS television network company, and Cinerama, which was distributing the product of the other network, ABC, managed to collect 10 per cent of the market between them. Both the television networks have dropped out of movie financing, and National General has been increasingly unhappy with loss-making film distribution. If anything, the grip of the major distributors is tightening in the American market. Why?

The reason is that the production, finance and the distribution of films are irrevocably linked. It is not practicable simply to finance a roster of films. And it is not possible simply to distribute films. (On a large scale, that is; there will always be room for small independents.) For one reason or another, those institutions that have gone into film financing and production without having control over a distribution organisation outfit have not lasted (e.g. Cinema Center, ABC). Those distribution organisations that gave up film financing and production, such as the Rank Organisation in Britain, have ceased to be very significant world distributors.

There are a bunch of factors that explain the necessity of the finance/distribution conjunction. The first is that, in spite of their glaring blemishes, the distributors know their business, and part of this knowledge carries over from one function—distribution—to the other—production/financing. This is a lesson that Robert Altman learned not so long ago. Dissatisfied with the way that MGM handled *Brewster McCloud*, and the way that Warner handled *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, he financed *Images* with the help of Hemdale, the young British showbiz company (now part of David Frost's Equity Enterprises). Seven

months later: 'The whole experience was not very pleasant. I now think it's probably a mistake not to have a distributor involved in a film from the time you enter production. Columbia didn't even know until two months beforehand that they were going to handle *Images*, so they didn't have much time to formulate advertising and marketing.'

On the whole, producers have found that the one thing worse than being involved with a major was not being involved with a major. They do, after all, have some helpful skills. Just as a good editor at a publishing house can make all the difference, a good movie executive can be useful to producers. They are not all the philistines of the cineaste's mythology.

The second factor is that film distribution is necessarily expensive, and so risky that distributors have to exercise some control over what they distribute. It is so expensive because the essence of film economics is that the unit of production costs millions of dollars, but the return comes back in millions of cents. It is gigantically expensive to get a film from studio to cinema. Very roughly, out of each \$100 of cinema receipts, \$60 is for the cinema costs and profit. Of the remaining \$40, about \$15 is available to cover the negative costs of the film, and the rest is for the overheads and profit of the distributor. In order to get the film into as many cinemas as possible, distributors have to have an international sales organisation. Very roughly, the majors each spend in the region of \$10m in North America and \$10m in the rest of the world maintaining sales offices. In a way, big time distribution is like the steel industry; the costs of entry are very high. If you want your own world sales force, that is, which is why the newcomers to film production used the existing distributors. The newcomers tried to use the distributors as wholesalers. 'Here are our films,' they said, 'which we have financed. You deduct a percentage from all you make by selling them, and pay the costs of prints and advertising, and hand over the balance to us.' It didn't work.

They reckoned without the third factor. The distribution fee is not just the payment for marketing—it includes a reward for

The Dominant Majors

Share of US and Canadian distributors' grosses

	1972 %	1971 %	1970 %
Paramount	21.6	17.0	11.8
Warner Brothers	17.6	9.3	5.3
United Artists	15.0	7.4	8.7
Columbia	9.1	10.2	14.1
20th Century-Fox	9.1	11.5	19.4
MGM	6.0	9.3	3.4
Universal	5.0	5.2	13.1
Walt Disney	5.0	8.0	9.1
National General/ Cinema Center	3.2	8.0	7.0
ABC/Cinerama	2.7	3.6	3.0

Source: *Variety*

taking the risks of handling the picture. When a picture is a success, that reward is too high; and when it is a disaster, it is too low, for the individual pictures. The only way distributors can survive is by setting the super-profits of one production against the super-losses of another and the nothing profits of the average picture. Only the film distributors have the cash flow to be able to do this risk-spreading, which is more akin to merchant banking than it is to wholesaling. Cash sticks to distributors; it has to. Those that merely make and finance pictures inevitably get an unfair percentage of the total take. This can be illustrated by the figures prepared by ABC when it pulled out of movies.

ABC financed, in whole or in part, some 36 films in the six years to 1972—putting its eggs in several baskets. The average budget was a moderate \$2m. The films included *Straw Dogs*, *Junior Bonner*, *Candy*, *The Killing of Sister George*, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, *Song of Norway*, *Kotch*, and half of *Cabaret*. Before taking account of the full benefit of *Cabaret*, or of sales to television, or, on the other hand, of production company overheads, the loss at the end of the day was reckoned to be \$47m.

	\$m.	\$m.
Rentals from cinemas		107
Negative costs	81	
Distribution fee	27	
Prints and advertising	36	
Interest	10	

	154
Loss	47

A huge slice of the costs, the prints and advertising, was under the control of distributors. And the distribution fee inevitably represents more than the basic costs of distribution. Very possibly, had exactly the same programme of films been financed at the same negative cost by the distributors, the total figure at the end of the day could be in the black, not in the red, thanks to lower real distribution costs and potentially higher revenues. As further evidence, there is the experience of the other powerful entertainment group that went into the movies, CBS's subsidiary Cinema Center Films. It also lost several tens of millions of dollars before learning that producing and financing films without control over distribution can be suicide.

So where does that leave us? In the laps of the distributors. For good economic reasons, the bulk of the films that get to the screen are financed by the distributors. They are the only people with the international sales force necessary to collar the cash; they alone have the cash flow to set off the inevitable losses against the much rarer successes; their knowledge of markets and experience at production, highly fallible though it is consistently proved to be, keeps a stream of films before our eyes that is tempting enough for us to want to dip hands in pockets.

It is in this broad context that the crisis of 1969–1971 must be seen. Remember all those articles about the decline of Hollywood, about Fox's horrific loss of \$65m in 1969 and \$81m the following year, about prob-

lems at MGM and at all the majors? It was not the beginning of the end, but a painful adjustment to the facts of life. The basic fact of cinema's industrial life is that the market for films in the United States is \$1.3 billion, and that American films can hope to take another \$1 billion or so at cinemas in the rest of the world and, say, another \$400m from television distribution.

Since only \$15 out of every \$100 taken in revenue is available for the recoupment of negative costs, the market can support an investment in the region of \$500m (the figures are, of reluctant necessity, extremely rough and ready). In 1968 the movie majors, who were still busily following the false god of trying to lure the television audience back with very expensive super-productions, had invested for current release some \$1.2 billion worth of films and projects. The result of such huge overstocking was that the companies had to take gigantic losses as they wrote off the values of the films and television rights down to a realistic level. But that is now over: for example, Fox's inventory of \$238m in 1968 is down to a mere \$65m now. (In an inflationary period, films are one of the products whose average cost has actually not increased—though rock-bottom has probably now been reached, and the only future direction is up again.) All the majors, except Columbia, which was among the last to go down, are healthily back in the money—and in a mood to celebrate their 50th birthdays.

If this economic analysis of the role of the majors in world production and distribution is accurate, then there are certain significant—and disparate—conclusions to be drawn:

1. If the cinema audience continues to shrink (and there are hopeful signs of an upturn) either the number of films distributed, or their average cost, will have to fall again.
2. The economics of the industry determine that 'independent' productions have a better chance of success if they are financed by a major distributor. It is possible to get films financed from other sources. In fact, hundreds of films are financed independently. According to *Variety*, 296 films were produced in 1972, and 170 were independents (although this includes 'independents' wholly financed by the studios). However, only 96 films made over \$1m for their distributors in North America. Some of them took much more, like *The Godfather*, which took \$81m. The figures show that the films that do well,

do very well—and those that do not do very well, do very badly. The 200 films that did not even make the \$1m, had to share a tiny pool of some \$50m left over by those that did, which means that most of those 200 made a loss for their financiers. A disproportionate number of non-independents avoided this fate. If for no other reason, it is because the big distributors have more muscle in getting movies into cinemas.

3. The power of the American distributors extends throughout Europe. It is because they make transnational films and have the transnational marketing outfit to handle them. The two things go together. The notion that French, or British, or Italian films would get a bigger showing if only there were a European film distribution network is wishful thinking. There has been nothing to stop the Europeans building up a distribution network as powerful as that of the Americans. But it has not come to pass. With frequent exceptions—which do usually get on to the international circuit—European countries make films for their own and a neighbour or two's edification. Thus the idea of fostering European distribution power, as expounded in *SIGHT AND SOUND* (Spring, 1973) by M. Claude Degand of the Centre National du Cinéma, is unrealistic.

4. There is no British film industry to speak of. Apart from the odd film made by Rank, EMI, or British Lion, the huge bulk of films made in Britain are financed by the American distributors. This is quite understandable. The British market is too small, and the costs of production are too high, for any but the most lucky or unimaginative (e.g., the films based on television programmes) to make a profit in Britain alone. There is no way to increase true British production except by making films more cheaply than the film unions will allow, or by subsidy. Or by encouraging a British distributor to go multi-national like the Americans. Rank tried and failed. With such a tiny home base—see the table—it is difficult. The total turnover of the British cinema, the money taken at the box-office, is only £60m—or a fifth of the turnover of the J. Sainsbury chain of grocery shops.

The major American film distributors combine international marketing with diversified risk-taking. It is a necessary combination. Since the total market for feature films shown in cinemas is, after adjustment for inflation, shrinking, the relative domination of the majors is likely to increase as less and less institutions find it worthwhile to get into the business of financing films or distributing them. The trend to smaller cinemas may not be the salvation it is cracked up to be. More cinemas might not bring in much more money in total at the box-office—simply the same amount in smaller doses. But the increased number of screens increases the demands for films to show. Thus the effect of fragmentation might be to increase the total costs of the film industry (i.e., the costs of running the cinemas, plus distributing the films, plus making them). It is too soon to tell. But the major new source of revenue for feature films lies in their distribution on network television, or on cable television or cassettes. And who will benefit from this? Why, the major distributors. We should learn how to stop worrying and love them.

Film markets: USA and the EEC

Box office grosses in 1972

	\$m
United States	1,300
Italy	364
France	202
West Germany	186
Britain	154
Belgium	33
The Netherlands	29
Denmark	23
	991

INTERVIEW WITH MARCO BELLOCCHIO



Nicoletta Zalaffi

Marco Bellocchio was only just out of film school when *Fists in the Pocket* burst on the world in 1965. His next two features, *China is Near* and *In the Name of the Father*, confirmed him as a director with a lot to say and an individualist way of saying it, an innovatory film-maker to be mentioned in the same breath as Godard, Bertolucci and Straub. But in Britain at least, Bellocchio's reputation after his first film rests mainly on report: *China is Near* has never been seen here, despite glowing accounts from European festivals; *In the Name of the Father* surfaced briefly as one of the highlights of last year's London Festival and has not been heard of since. Bellocchio has since made another film, *Slap the Monster on Page One*, but as yet there is no sign of it getting nearer to London than the Edinburgh Festival.

Fists in the Pocket

The idea for *Fists in the Pocket* came from the need—it was a psychological need—to settle accounts with my past. It was while I was staying in England that I found I could take the step backwards which I needed to be able to write the first draft of the film. London acted as a kind of filter through which I could refine a number of personal experiences which tied in with more general

experiences and make something coherent of them. If there seem to be any echoes of Greek tragedy in the film, that was entirely accidental. *Fists in the Pocket* was really my answer to the questions I was asking myself in an effort to sort out my difficulties with the real world. I made it at a time when I was asking myself what I was going to do with my life, and I was so anxious to come to grips with these particular themes that I hardly thought about style: the style

dictated itself as I was shooting. I simply wanted to convey my own love-hate feelings about life, as effectively as I could and with no premeditation.

I had no wish to follow the traditional routes towards film directing, and I knew I'd never find a producer mad enough to trust me, so I decided to write a story which I could make fairly cheaply, and eliminated any scene which would have meant production costs outside my resources. Obviously from the moment I thought of making a film, apart from these self-imposed restrictions involved in trying to make it work within the budget, I was thinking of a story which would relate directly to my own life and which would be an attempt to interpret my own most violent feelings and traumatic experiences.

A sort of transference?

If you like, but only in relation to the violent feelings which were inherent in my own self. *Fists in the Pocket* was my first adult rebellion, whereas *Abasso lo Zio** was still a schoolboy game. But all the same, this short film was my first approach to the theme of death, which is the dominant one in my work. If I hadn't had such a tight budget, *Fists in the Pocket* would have been a naturalistic film, with a more accurate sociological—that is, social—background, related to a larger reality. It would maybe have been after the style of a Renoir or a Becker film, in other words close to the French novelistic tradition which has always fascinated me. They say that hunger sharpens the mind. Since I had to work in a family context, the family became my dramatic space; I found myself probing the relationships between the members of a nuclear cell.

But today I'm more attracted to surrealism. Since I've had the resources to make what I want, the temptation to make a naturalistic film has disappeared of itself, and with *In the Name of the Father* I didn't allow myself to set up any direct relationship with reality.

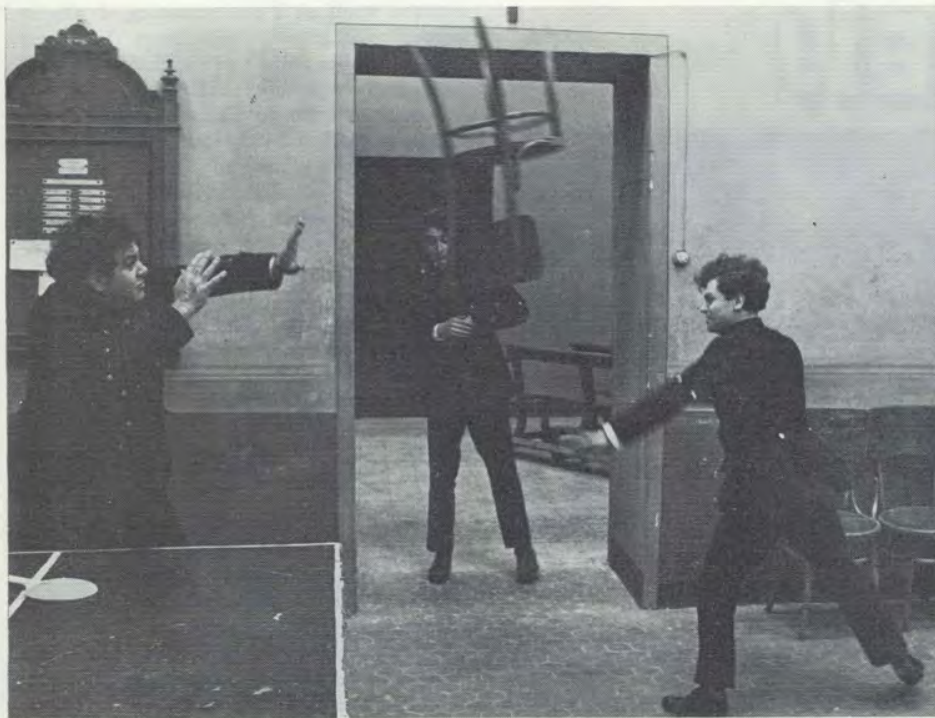
China is Near

China is Near grew out of a need to approach the political reality of Italy in a more direct way than in *Fists in the Pocket*. In relying almost exclusively on a number of personal—provincial—experiences, I had to avoid the trap of intellectual analysis if I was to keep as close as possible to what seemed to me the truth of the moment. I was trying to interpret Italian history by watching what was happening from my window, and the events themselves overtook me. My perspective on the world of the 'Chinese' had been falsified by the role I'd chosen: as a passive observer, I was relying on only the most grotesque, sectarian attitudes, thinking this would give me the effect of farce I was looking for. With the rapid development of confrontation in the universities, I realised that it was only by directly participating in what was happening that I could hope to understand it. Which led me to commit myself politically. In joining the Communist Union in 1968, I wanted to take my role

'In the Name of the Father'



*Before making *Fists in the Pocket*, Bellocchio directed three short films: *La Colpa e la Pena* and *Abasso lo Zio* in 1961, and *Ginepro fatto Uomo* in 1962.



'In the Name of the Father': 'I fashioned a story round a dull daily routine . . .'

as a militant as far as it would go. That's why I made *Paola* and *Il Primo Maggio Rosso* then, in collaboration with the Union.

To use a rather tired expression, I could say they were both 'militant' films; not just because they dealt with socio-political problems affecting a particularly backward region of Italy, but because they were made to back a political organisation whose declared aim was to serve the people. In 1968, a lot of Italian intellectuals were enthusiastically aligning themselves with this group on the Left of the Italian Communist Party; but it was a case of moral alignment rather than a readiness to integrate themselves into the life of the proletariat in any viable way.

To return to *China is Near*, I would also

say that with this film I wanted to show that even if social classes are tending to disappear and integrate, this is only illusory. There will always be winners and losers; the disinherited have always existed and always will exist. That's why Vittorio (Glaucio Mauri) wanted the 'rich' to acquire a much wider social consciousness, though deep down he doubts whether this will ever happen. 'Yes, you're right,' he says to his pro-Chinese brother Camillo (Pierluigi Aprà), 'but it's useless. The things you believe in, and which basically though inadequately I also believe in, won't happen. On the other hand, to believe in a just cause and not to believe that it can happen is the same as not believing that it is a just cause. . .'

'In the Name of the Father': 'I attended religious schools as both a boarder and a day boy . . .'



I regard *China is Near* as a didactic film: not because I wanted to show how one should live, but how one should not live.

Through the Looking Glass

Mirrors have an important role in your films. . .

In *Fists in the Pocket* the mirrors reflect the narcissistic side of the two brothers. As always, isolation leads to self-love. A mirror becomes a way of conversing with one's alter ego, of avoiding solitude in watching one's own reflection. By controlling their slightest change of expression, Giulia and Alessandro use their weakness to evade reality and solve their problems in an individualist and thus a negative way.

In *In the Name of the Father*, the mirror—more precisely the mirror used by Franc to kill his mother's image—is an affirmation of impotence. By this gesture, Franc acknowledges his predisposition to live his experiences indirectly, like every intellectual. Yes, you're right, he watches himself living. Watching yourself living is an attitude dictated by a Catholic education. Actions in themselves are of no significance to a Catholic intellect, since they are not important in so far as they modify other actions, but only in so far as they represent a victory or a defeat of the will.

You've said that you see something of yourself in Franc. Do you watch yourself living?

In the Name of the Father is a demonstration of failure, certainly, since it's a statement by a proletarian manqué. One would have to know how to be on the side of 'the class that makes history', not just in words but in actions. So I can say that I've remained a petit bourgeois progressive; but, as Mao says, the bourgeoisie is a useful class for revolution precisely because it is gregarious. And Franc represents the classic position of the intellectual. He has to forgo bourgeois privileges in order to share the destiny of the working class, since he realises that knowledge comes not from books but from direct experience. 'You can only transform yourself by agreeing to live the destiny of the workers to the very end. . .'

But *In the Name of the Father* is no more autobiographical than *Fists in the Pocket*. I'm fairly well acquainted with priests, since I attended religious schools both as a boarder and a day boy; but what I remember from my own time at school is not what you see in the film, but a kind of intellectual degradation in the atmosphere.

I fashioned a story round a very dull daily routine, which was the reality of those years, so that my characters could realise our schoolboy dreams, the quiet loathing of our superiors which we kept in our minds. Let's say that with this film I carried out Remondini's vow: to go and bomb the college with a plane-load of shit.

The only pupil to reject the dream is Angelo. He tries to break out of the intellectual torpor in which they want to keep him. While I hope he's a reasonably self-sufficient character, I recognise myself in Angelo as well as in Franc: his aspiration to power, a temptation intrinsic to Western intellectuals, is also mine. . . There always comes a moment when an intellectual wearies of writing or of 'making art', since he seems always to be watching events from his window instead of joining in. This

frustration—which is erroneous—provokes the urge to command, to take an active part as a cog in a machine like the State or big industry. Angelo's most negative aspect is his total contempt for people, combined with the side of him which sees 'progress through authority'. His venture fails because of a frantic individualism which keeps him in a permanent state of inferiority.

So he needs to be guided by a 'guardian angel', or an intellectual idealist?

Exactly. That's why although he is fascinated by Franc—his other half—he despises him. This 'love-hate' relationship also works the other way round. Franc surrenders to Angelo's force of character, but he realises that he's being caught up in fascist behaviour and hates the dictator in his friend. Some critics have seen fascist tendencies in *In the Name of the Father*, perhaps because Angelo's charm goes beyond the limits I wanted to give the character.

How did the Church react to the film?

As always, the Church has this extraordinary capacity for taking over and adapting everything to its own ends. The use of metaphor and the past tense allowed it to put everything down to the fact that one pontificate was ending, and so to religious politics that were out of date. There is something Machiavellian about the way they reacted—like the school principal in the film, when at the end of the boys' play instead of accepting the provocation he decides to absorb the scandal by applauding.

With the death of Pius XII, the Church decided to review its policies. The principal spokesman of this modernisation crusade was Pope John; and with the Ecumenical Council, not only Catholics but many progressives and Communists as well thought that the Church was about to institute radical changes. In fact, all it did was to restructure itself administratively so as to turn itself into an efficient business operation.

In the Name of the Father is not a realistic film but an allegorical film in which I put all my theories together. I didn't shoot all the scenes which might have defined the characters more precisely, because I don't believe in the old formulas. And I cut all the scenes which seemed to me errors of taste. I think Mao's precept is self-evident: 'Without artistic quality any concept is reduced to a slogan.'

We are all Bastards

The priests all have names which characterise them morally, but what's the meaning of the prefect Diotaiuti's name?

In Italy there is a tradition of *bons sentiments* which you find in De Amicis. Illegitimate boys were the subject of a whole literary tradition which elevated a kind of low-grade sentimentality. When choosing a name for her son, an unmarried mother decided between love and hate. If she felt she could put any trust in 'Providence', she called him Diotaiuti ('God help you'), Diotiguardi ('God keep you'), etc. But if she felt any hatred towards her offspring, she made up vulgar names for him. You only have to pick up the telephone directory and look at the origins of names to see whether it's not the case that we are all bastards. There are thousands of names which derive from illegitimacy. . .

Mors tua, Vita mea

Death in this particular film symbolises one of the cardinal points of Catholic ideology. Death represents a fundamental moment in the life of a Catholic, and in whatever form he will always be conscious of it, because it's a stake that is too often at risk. The edifice of death in which a Catholic feels himself sheltered is extremely dangerous because, paradoxical as it may seem, there is nothing more 'tranquillising' than the constant reminders of death, and the mixture of obsession and reassurance they produce. There is nothing more dreadful than to forget that you have to die, and moreover that death will come without warning. Angelo makes Franc realise that dying in sin, in damnation, is an outdated idea. The classical attitude to death—which is profoundly negative—falsifies one's attitude to life, in the sense that it is geared to the moment when one stops living.

Death as something which creates a relationship with a metaphysical, infallible

with the idea of the miraculous pear-tree because it allowed me to show Angelo and Tino in the act of cutting down a tree. A symbolic image. Angelo is determined to reject every sign of the irrational in the name of technocracy, while at the same time recognising that the industrial towns are seeing the rise of another kind of superstition, a brand of mystical illusion which the ruling classes are developing in their efforts to get industry off the ground. Angelo's ideology is also quite closely linked to that of the Communists during the 1960s, when many former Stalinists united with the Centre-Left. When Marxism filled that gap, the Communists adopted a kind of doctrine of technocratic efficiency, and these were the years of economic boom in Italy. All this was resoundingly reversed by the 1968 confrontations.

It's important that at the end of the film Angelo's technocratic madness and Tino's quite ordinary madness come together. The refrain Angelo uses to punctuate his speeches in Mongo—'Klatu-Barada-Nic-



'In the Name of the Father': schoolboy vision of the Virgin

being, as something which sums up and determines man's destiny after his time on earth, a destiny more important than life itself, has become a card which has been played too often. In this film, I wanted to show death 'historically', as our teachers taught us to recognise it.

Freud says that before you can be completely adult you must learn to kill your father. In your films, however, you only have the mother killed . . .

Then I'm probably not yet adult. Killing the mother solves no problems. If the mother is a negative character, it's just as negative to think that by killing her the problems will be resolved. The most dangerous serpent, and the most venomous, is really the father . . .

A petit bourgeois Saint

Miracles are hardly a common occurrence today, but there was a time when they were happening all over the place. I was pleased

that the title—'is a reference to a film—I can't remember the title.

I shot a very good scene in which the mechanism of the miraculous pear-tree was lit up, but I had to cut it because the film was really too long. The girl's parents see a chance to make some money out of the tree, and so they decide that she must learn to read and write so that she can deal with the TV reporters. In practice, what they were doing was making a little bourgeois saint out of her, a sort of press officer whose job was maintaining good public relations between God and man.

The Glass Menagerie

Gide said that the best subjects for drama come from entomology, and Buñuel admits that his approach to the main character in *El* is that of an entomologist. You seem to approach your characters in the same way . . .

IN THE PICTURE



The Appalshoppers

A resident movie production company in the U.S. Appalachian mountains? It seems unlikely, since the Appalachians are, to the rest of the country, synonymous with backwardness, poverty and ignorance. But if you walk down the main street of the small town of Whitesburg, Kentucky, you'll come to the grubby storefront office of the APPALSHOP—a group that has been making movies in the Appalachian mountains for three years. And these film-makers aren't imports from California or New York. They are mountain young people, most of them 20 or 21, a few around 30, and most of them coal-miners' children.

Operating with a fluctuating income, mostly from grants, and a fluctuating membership—about 20 are on some kind of salary now—the Appalshoppers have completed 12 short documentaries and one 20-minute dramatic film on Appalachian life. Usually working without scripts, they have recorded the way an old-fashioned butcher kills and cleans and cuts up hogs, the way a traditional Baptist congregation wash each other's feet and hold baptisms in the river, the way young people feel about going to the mines.

The APPALSHOP films have been shown all over the United States—from UCLA to Yale, from New England's Robert Flaherty Seminar to Tennessee's Sinking Creek Festival. Now the APPALSHOP is getting ready to make its first feature-length film: *Divine Right's Trip*, Kentuckian Gurney Norman's *Last Whole Earth Catalog* saga of a drug-culture freak who finds home and salvation in the Eastern Kentucky mountains.

The APPALSHOP has come a long way from its beginning, three years ago, as an American Film Institute project financed by the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity. Then, its sole purpose

was to train young people for jobs in the film industry—a not particularly realistic purpose, since Kentucky had no film industry and most of the trainees were still homebound teenagers. What happened, instead, was that the trainees created their own industry, diversified to include not only film production but also a television studio, a still photography section, and a recording wing. Whereas the first Appalshoppers, mostly Whitesburg kids, sometimes shot basketball goals in the main office, today's Appalshoppers, who come from several Appalachian states, get up at 5 a.m. to shoot a flea market and spend hours at their

rented Steenbeck editing machine.

Although the APPALSHOP is no longer an OEO project and has gone far beyond that project's goal, it still trains young mountain film-makers. 'You could learn more about film here in two months than you could at the University of Kentucky in four years,' says one of this year's trainees. A more experienced Appalshopper, Ben Zickafoose, who went to New York University's graduate film school, says, 'The school mentality is so low—here's our camera, they say; you can handle it, but don't drop it. Three weeks after I came here I was in a coal-mine shooting with a camera.' Probably the basic reason the APPALSHOP trains effectively is that the trainees know they're trying to produce high-quality films for rental and sale.

However, the APPALSHOP films have not been circulating long enough to provide a firm financial base: only \$14,000 of the \$150,000 budget for the 1972-1973 fiscal year came from film rental and sale. So the APPALSHOP looks for financial support from foundations (like the National Endowment for the Humanities), government branches (like the Kentucky Arts Commission) and other organisations and individuals. And the young fund-raisers usually find what they're looking for. Still, the APPALSHOP's dependence on other organisations makes its financial status precarious. 'Our existence is always on the line,' says Bill Richardson, who set up the APPALSHOP and will direct *Divine Right's Trip*. 'A workshop like ours is completely outside the structured system for economic stability.'

Yet the financial insecurity may be less of a threat to this unusual

group than the Appalshoppers' mobility. Mostly unfettered by wives or husbands or children, young and still looking around, they 'come and go'. Dianna Ott, who is going to college in Iowa this fall, remembers the winter of 1972 as a bleak time, with several APPALSHOP people scattered around the country. 'It looked at that point as though we were just going to dry up,' she says. 'The strange thing that was happening was that people, wherever they were, were planning... and when they came back it was like a boom—it just exploded.'

No one can tell how long the explosion will last, but the APPALSHOP's 21-year-old coordinator, Marty Newell, talks of opening a second APPALSHOP somewhere else in the Appalachians, and then maybe another, and another. All this sounds like a pipe dream, but the APPALSHOP as it now exists would have sounded that way three years ago. And even if the APPALSHOP doesn't last, it has demonstrated that unlikely people in unlikely places can make movies.

CAROL POLSGROVE

Coppola's Conversation

Francis Ford Coppola is busy this fall. He is deep into the further adventures of the Corleone family, now without Brando, and delivering *The Conversation*. With Watergate in mind, Paramount has been after Coppola for months to hurry through post-production work on *The Conversation*, a thriller about the threats of electronic eavesdropping and the minds of the men who do the bugging. But Coppola has taken his time. The film, he says, will be out in November.

'I had been terrified by the whole Orwellian dimension of electronic spying and the invasion of privacy when I started *The Conversation* six years ago. I realised that a bugging expert was a special breed of man, not just a private eye playing with far-out gadgets, and I thought it would be fascinating to get inside the mind and experience of such a man. It's just a curious, not a prescient, coincidence that the picture should finally surface, so to speak, at the same time as the Watergate affair.'

Gene Hackman plays the bugging expert. 'He's ideal because he's so ordinary, so unexceptional in appearance. The man he plays is in his forties and has been doing this strange job for years. We begin the picture with an apparently harmless conversation between a young couple (Cindy Williams and Frederick Forrest) in a San Francisco park. The Hackman character records them, without really knowing why. Gradually, he begins to realise that the couple will be murdered. Their imminent death is due to him, and yet he takes orders from the head of an impersonal corporation, a man of enormous power. During the picture we see the conversation over and over again, assuming different meanings

Appalshoppers in action near Whitesburg. Photo: Shelby Adams





Gene Hackman and Francis Ford Coppola shooting 'The Conversation' in San Francisco

in Hackman's memory. At first it seems a scene of sunny blandness, and then you begin to see that even though the couple are talking about nothing but shopping, they're very frightened.'

If Marlon Brando hadn't refused to play Don Corleone in the sequel, *The Godfather—Part II* would have the same back-and-forth time structure. 'Brando liked the idea of showing Corleone at various periods of his life, with a very free narrative.' But when, in June, Coppola became convinced that Brando could not be persuaded to return, he began extensive revisions of his screenplay to shift the emphasis to the next generation. The Brando character remains in one flashback to his Sicilian youth. Otherwise, *The Godfather—Part II* will now start more or less where the original left off, with Al Pacino and Robert Duvall repeating their original roles as Michael Corleone and Tom Hagen.

AXEL MADSEN

Second Childhood

A programme with the somewhat curious title of 'Young Screen 1973' was presented at the NFT in June. Billed as a selection of short films by young people between the ages of eight and twenty, it was launched on what must be the crest of international enthusiasm for movies by young children.

Ten years ago, such a programme, if presented at all, would have been relegated to some remote and dusty auditorium and the publicity would have extended no further than the mimeographed pages of a school newspaper. Today, the pre-adolescent has entered the ranks of the cinema's superstars. In the past month alone, aside from the 3-day NFT programme, major competitions have been held in Scandinavia and

America; the BBC ran a two-part series called *Search* devoted to dramas, animation and documentaries by under-16s; and an international youth competition, called the Tenth Muse Contest, will be held in Helsinki this autumn.

The film world today is rather like a doting parent who on hearing his five-year-old pick out 'Jingle Bells' on the piano, is seized with visions of a young Horowitz knocking off the entire Diabelli Variations before he can read. There is no question that some—not many, but some—films by young children display great sensitivity and imagination, and one can on occasion discern a precocious talent in even very young works. But it is not to mine out the diamond in the rough that these festivals were organised, nor is the encouragement of young talent their primary task.

Indeed, the teachers responsible for the production of the films go out of their way to present sound, conservative and thoroughly conventional pedagogic rationales for each film; and these rationales are appended, like an approved list of ingredients, to the programme notes: 'to focus attention on a single theme', to encourage 'group cooperative work', 'acquaintance with technique', 'achievement and success integrates studies . . . experience in modern medium', and so forth.

These programme notes are really the clue to the concept of children's film as it is practised today, and to the explosive popularity of the kind of festival of which Young Screen 1973 is only too typical. Clearly, film is not being used here as an end in itself; rather, its function is as a tool to develop and extend pedagogic principles of function specialisation, literary analysis, formalisation of an independently conceived idea, and, most important, group cooperation. This cooperation, however, is nearly always based on

the traditional division of labour which is the hallmark of contemporary schools. In short, it is only the medium which has been changed: in terms of the creative process, the class could just as well be preparing a term paper or a wall exhibit. Since the primary objective is not to unleash whatever creative powers the students may possess, but rather to illustrate the already existing school curriculum (albeit from a 'novel', 'contemporary' or 'creative' vantage point), it is hardly surprising that creativity and originality rarely surface.

It becomes even less surprising when one realises that of the 27 films shown in the Young Screen 1973 programme, 21 were made under the direct supervision of a teacher, a supervision which often extended to scriptwriting, directing and editing. One is forced to the realisation that 'Young Screen' is a horrible misnomer; the festival was, in fact, a veritable orgy of advanced middle age. What was shown was, with few exceptions, a survey of how secondary school teachers fare as film-makers; and it is hardly surprising that they are no more qualified to stand behind a camera than any other random group of non-professionals.

It was with acute embarrassment that one watched the frustrated literary ambitions of the Head of English at a secondary school manifest themselves in a film called *The Forsaken Merqueen*. The only function of the pupils (in this case, adolescent girls) was of unwitting actresses: even the camerawork was done by a staff member. While the girls, dressed in flowing Grecian robes, gathered on a beach, a mock epic of singular pretentiousness and banality was read, voice-over, on the soundtrack. The role of the teacher here is of crucial importance. It is quite possible that 13-year-olds, if left to themselves, could produce any number of movies, some of which might be interesting and some

considerably less so. But no 13-year-old, indeed no one except a Head of English at a secondary school, could have produced anything quite like the product presented here. What is important about this film is not that it is bad, but that it is being marketed under a false label. It is not a children's film at all.

Similarly with a travelogue called *Alpine Life*, a film of which the programme organisers seemed quite proud since it was also featured in a special exhibit in the lobby. One could well say that, considering the technical and budgetary limitations under which the film was produced, it came out rather well. It was a recognisable documentary, and I have seen far worse in commercial houses. But the film is disheartening for all that. One cannot help but be dismayed by the realisation that a group of adolescents, starting out on their first film and beholden to no one, should choose to emulate what must surely be the most boring genre in all of film. If the very youngest film-makers are already opting for the safest path, then where can one look for innovation?

Two weeks after this rather discouraging enterprise, Colin Young of the National Film School gave a talk at the International Technology Conference in London, in which he deplored the rise of a new class on the periphery of film-making: the class of film teachers who are not themselves professionals in this field. The explosive rise in attendance at film schools (and film departments at universities) has led to a heavy demand for teachers; and many of these, particularly in America, have been recruited from within academe, rather than among the professionals. The optimum situation, of course, would be for professional film-makers and technicians to teach for a limited time and then return to their primary occupations. However, the difficulties involved are of course considerable, and compromises must be made.

If the problems are great at university level, one must conclude that they are nearly insurmountable at the secondary and elementary levels. The ideal film environment for young children, in which they can observe professionals at work in all aspects of film-making, is quite obviously not within even the most utopian bounds of practicality. Since we cannot have the ideal, we must settle for the next best thing. And that, I believe, is simply giving children access to the simplest possible equipment (silent super-8 cameras, viewers and tape splicers), and then leaving them strictly alone. Film in the context of a conventional school curriculum will neither develop the creative potential of children, nor will it ever be a suitable training ground for future film-makers. Until film is divorced from the constraints which the system imposes on it, its effect on children, and on the future of film itself, can only be negative.

JAMES PAUL GAY



Cinema interior by John Alexander

Super Cinemas

Recent exhibitions devoted to the watercolours of John Alexander, and to Odeon design, have focused attention on the preservation of cinema buildings. Nostalgia of course plays its part, but mainly there is now a keen awareness of the contribution of the 1930s in the field of architecture, furniture and design generally. Nowhere is this expressed more clearly than in the super cinema. Two years ago the idea of the Government listing a super cinema as a building of special architectural or historic interest would have been dismissed by almost everyone as an eccentric's death wish. The era was even then not yet properly appreciated. Then suddenly it happened, and a year ago the Government protected Theodore Komisarjevsky's incredible Venetian fantasy, the Granada, Tooting; and Wamsley Lewis' vision of a fairy underwater palace, the New Victoria.

Since then the subject of cinema preservation has aroused constant interest and publicity, and this public participation brought about the events that resulted in the first showing of the watercolours of John Alexander in London at the NFT, and later at the Architectural Association. The Newcastle firm of M. Alexander and Sons was a familiar name in the field of cinema design throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Under their director, John Alexander, they

produced, from the end of the First World War until his retirement in 1954, hundreds of decorative schemes for cinema interiors in the North-East of England. Almost invariably they worked with architects who produced the structure into which they created the setting for the wonders of the silver screen. In particular, Alexander had the contract for many years for the extensive Empire chain of theatres and cinemas, but he also designed interiors for the Essoldo and Regal circuits, as well as numerous smaller cinema chains and private owners. His greatest innovation was that by use of his exceptional imagination and immaculate draughtsmanship he anticipated in remarkable fashion the art-deco motifs that were later to become the main feature of the Odeon house style.

The parallel with the interiors is a timely reminder of the benefits of a classically based art education, gained at college in Newcastle. Already in the late 20s Alexander was experimenting with great mythical figures, horses and chariots flanking the proscenium arch, in much the same way that they reappeared in 1937 at Andrew Mather and Harry Weedon's Odeon, Leicester Square. Incidentally it is rumoured that this superb plasterwork, so unnecessarily mutilated by Rank a few years ago, is shortly to be restored to its original appearance. This would be the most worthy cause

for celebration in Rank's growing awareness of the riches they possess in the way of cinema architecture; a process that began recently with the splendid redecoration of the New Victoria.

Throughout the 20s and 30s, and indeed until 1954, Alexander and his assistants produced a series of coloured perspective drawings illustrating all the work they were doing. This included designs for components such as light fittings and fibrous plaster decorations, as well as whole and part interiors and the odd exterior. It was a chance social call to Mr. Alexander's present home by a young local teacher that brought to light the existence of this collection, regarded by him as valueless sketches for work long forgotten. He was cheerfully consigning the lot to the dustbin, together with the timber templates that were prepared and cut out for use in the application of decorative painted motifs. Much had already been lost, including the whole of the fibrous plaster moulds, and indeed the perspectives were being stacked by the bins for carting away. Mr. Alexander was prevailed upon to reprieve them while the Victoria and Albert Museum were alerted. As a result of their prompt action, I was able to initiate a rescue operation and bring the whole collection to London.

The names of the cinemas evoke nostalgic memories of that great era of cinema building after the First World War: the Apollo at Birtley; the Olympia at Blackhill; the Majestic, South Bank; the Capitol, Low Fell; and the twin Victoria and Albert cinemas at Stanley. They were mainly in and around Newcastle and the North-East, but Alexander designed interiors elsewhere, in particular at Dundee and Glasgow (Green's Playhouse, 1927), Brighton, Exeter, Maidstone and Worcester.

The drawings range from the garish colours of the rectangular barrel-vaulted halls of the early 20s, through to the classical pastel elegance of super cinemas of the 30s at Stockton-on-Tees and Wigan, with one especially magnificent example of art-deco in the Northwick Cinema, Worcester. Is this interior still intact? It is not possible to identify many of the cinemas, and not all the drawings are completed or of consistent quality. At the end of his career, Alexander was still nostalgically designing in the manner, if without the sheer finesse, of twenty years earlier. It is a field in which time must inevitably pass one by. What the drawings represent, however, is an unique record of the period, and the enthusiasm that went into cinema decoration, where so little survives after doing battle with progressive modernisation and unsympathetic redecoration, conversion or final closure.

If John Alexander did no work for the Oscar Deutsch empire, then the Odeon exhibition which began in Wolverhampton and has recently been to London effectively fills the gap. Redolent with nostalgia, mighty Wurlitzer play-

ing and potted palms waving overhead, this presentation demonstrated very clearly the origins of the influential Odeon house style.

Cecil Clavering was responsible for the initial rough sketches that were to become the distinctive Odeon treatment of a broad flat façade of brick or faience with rounded corners, topped by a slender faience-faced advertising tower. At the time Clavering was a young assistant in Harry Weedon's Birmingham office, and he didn't stay long, but the style did. The first building that resulted was the Odeon, Kingstanding, Birmingham in 1935. It was followed by the Odeon, Sutton Coldfield, and these were the first of a long line. Deutsch and Weedon realised they were on to a good thing. Vary the basic ingredients only slightly, and you not only have a recognisable house style, but you also save time and expense in drawing and erection. Deutsch wanted an Odeon in every town of over 25,000 inhabitants, and he nearly did it; by 1937 they were opening at the rate of two a week.

Harry Weedon's best known Odeons were in the Midlands and North: Colwyn Bay, Scarborough, Lancaster, Wolverhampton, Morecambe, Birmingham, Dudley, Blackpool and Leicester in chronological order. Only at Chester and York (both 1936) did he depart from the streamlined Odeon style and produce something more suited to their historic environment. His only London cinema was at Swiss Cottage (1937), a surprisingly ineffectual, uncharacteristic effort in brick. The typical Odeon seated around 1,400-1,800 (unlike the palatial Granada at Tooting, which seated 3,500), and was plain and spacious, usually endowed with a touch of art-deco flanking the proscenium arch.

In London and the Home Counties the Odeons were mainly designed by Andrew Mather and George Coles. Mather was altogether brasher and more extrovert, as can be seen at his twin-towered Odeon, Camberwell of 1939, although his masterpiece, the Odeon, Chingford, has sadly been demolished. Coles was perhaps the most versatile and talented of all cinema architects, and during a long career worked for all the principal chains. His designs range from the amazing Chinese-style Palace at Southall in 1929 (which became a Gaumont, then an Odeon, then the Godeon, and most recently the Liberty) to the epitome of the true Odeon style, the examples at Woolwich (1937) and Balham (1938). Balham is closed and awaits demolition, but Woolwich is the finer, little altered and still open—perhaps the best of all Odeons, it sums up the whole style and era and must be preserved.

These exhibitions have crystallised the nature of interest in the preservation of super cinemas, and indeed of the best examples of that ever rarer breed, the early pre-1914 'penny-gaffs'—the ones that invariably later became the local flea-pits. A careful appraisal is required of what is left. Of more

than 5,500 super cinemas at the height of the 1930s, fewer than 1,500 now remain. The selective listing and preservation of the best surviving examples will help ensure an adequate permanent record of a vanished era.

DAVID ATWELL

Contact in Ghana

Every time we think of Africa, we think of discovery; even film critics can't forget Stanley. Linked to our habit of judging one thing by the criterion of another in the guise of international brotherhood, and to the competitive instinct of industrial civilisation, a critic's trip to Africa is fraught with the dangers of misjudgment. Too easily we begin to talk of 'them', of 'progress' and of aesthetics. Even seeing a lot of African films before you go there doesn't help. The films aren't made to be seen here, and in a way we aren't made to see them there. But we do both, joyfully, and chronicle our disappointments. The cinema is a lowest-common-denominator form that costs a lot of money to make and see; native cultures have very few common denominators, and aren't based on economics. Or weren't, until recently.

I went to Ghana with expectations; two weeks there were barely enough to dispel these. The drought in the Sahel belt was in all the papers, caused, apparently, by indiscriminate exploitation and destruction of the forests south of the Sahara. An Italian was making a movie about this; the first Italian-Ghanaian co-production. A movie, it seemed from the script, full of social meaning, political righteousness, goodwill between nations. *Contact* by Giorgio Bontempi, when finished, may touch upon these subjects. It will offer no answers.

Africa hits you in the face coming off the plane, literally and emphatically. The heat is a tangible force, engulfing you, pushing you, moulding the strange sounds, smells, visual aspects and attitudes into one, physical whole. At once, your interest in film seems secondary. Until you realise that film here is part of the whole impact. Trying to look at films and film-making in Ghana means looking at Ghana.

Only four features have been made here to date, all by the local, semi-governmental Ghana Film Industry Corporation, headed by Sam Aryeetey, who trained at the London Film School. They are films by locals, for locals, about local things: slow, music-burdened, mythological, humorous. They did very well in Ghana. Based on traditional tales, sometimes brought up to date, or on a popular play; rarely scripted purely from reality. But they do touch common problems arising in a culture in the process of sudden transfer to a system of international monopoly. Autonomy, poverty, class dichotomies, traditions. They don't teach or preach, don't tend to cause change or polemicise. They are just there, existing, like Africa. Which is what African culture may be all about.

Into this complacent eddy march European film producers, sexy starlets, crews used to screaming and hurrying. Industrialising African economy welcomes them, but smartens up fast: in the end the Italians are forced to make a 50/50 deal, finding easy pickings turned out to be a dream of the colonial past. But the meaning of this is less positive than we might think: it only means that a new, smart, ruling economic hierarchy has taken over. It is now blacks who run the machinery; the machinery hasn't changed.

This is both the story of my trip to see the film *Contact* shot, and the story of the film itself, except that the script, for film producers, substitutes lumber merchants. What must it have felt like to be making a film patently about oneself with methods one purported to be criticising? Fascinatingly, Bontempi and his producer, Alfredo Ascalone, knew what they were doing. Seven years previously, it had been Ascalone himself who had come to Ghana to make hay. The film tells his story. The Africans had won, but at what a price. And they were winning this time, with the film, too. Hopefully with better results.

Ghana is the only English-speaking country in Africa, apparently, that has full film-making facilities, including studios, equipment, trained crews, and full black-and-white lab facilities, sound studios and air-conditioned negative cutting rooms. Soon it will have colour developing facilities and hopes to embark on a series of co-productions. Accra is like any new town—wide open streets, modern hotels, a certain degree of efficiency, expensive. It could be a suburb of Frankfurt, except for the faces. The country is the length of Great Britain, and twice its breadth. In the North and in the bush they know power is in the South, in the city; the fact that its wielders have changed from the British to Nkrumah and then through three putsches into military hands has changed little in this orientation. It still means that your fate is in the hands of others. This is the basic colonial structure. It has not changed.

Actually, since the cinema has always tended, by nature, to be a colonial form (the few influencing the many, the lack of feedback, the need to generalise, colonising people's minds), the new Ghana

may be a fertile ground for the creation of a popular, African entertainment industry. There is not all that ballast of intellectual traditions, the native ones are disappearing, and the new technocracy can use a tool of propaganda. Conceivably, even, being virgin territory striving for a new identity, this kind of thing may be just what is needed. The fact that what will be born from these factors might turn into an abomination of all that is natively African, may just be a decadent, European intellectual's fear.

GIDEON BACHMANN

West Egg at Pinewood

This summer, Jack Clayton has been shooting *The Great Gatsby* at Pinewood, in sets austere closed against what would otherwise no doubt be a steady parade of visiting pressmen. The unit arrived from America in July, after filming for five weeks at Newport, Rhode Island. If Long Island itself no longer looks like Scott Fitzgerald's 'slender, riotous island', Newport presumably remains for ever Newport, with a house called Rosecliff (built in 1902 and modelled after the Petit Trianon) standing in for Gatsby's mansion, and the summer home of Mrs. Onassis' mother providing exteriors for the Buchanans' place at East Egg. West Egg at Pinewood seems a rather more exotic proposition. But why not? Perhaps, after all, movies are creeping back to the self-created world of the studios.

Gatsby is Jack Clayton's first film since *Our Mother's House* in 1967. Never exactly prolific (only four films in the fifteen years since *Room at the Top*), Clayton is returning in style with the movie that everyone must have been after. His projects announced but then postponed or abandoned during

Jean-Pierre Melville, who died in August 1973, photographed standing in the ruins of his own studio after its destruction by fire in 1967.
Photo: Nicoletta Zalaffi



the years between have been eclectically and intriguingly ambitious: a film about Sir Basil Zaharoff, the armaments king, and another project about American atrocities in Vietnam. He also spent a long time some years ago trying to lick the script problems presented by John Le Carré's *The Looking Glass War*, later filmed by Frank Pierson in a version which dodged some of the difficulties but also missed most of the book.

All the same, it's surprising that the quintessential novel of the American 1920s should have gone to an Englishman, and an English studio. Clayton himself has worked on the script with the very prolific Francis Ford Coppola, who has established his own strong sense of the American past and the American dream. Among other writers approached at earlier times, Gore Vidal apparently said that he wouldn't, and Truman Capote that he couldn't. Casting—Robert Redford as Gatsby, Mia Farrow as Daisy, Bruce Dern as Tom Buchanan, Sam Waterston, the limping man who drowns in the Gatsby-like swimming pool of *Savages*, as Nick Carraway—settled down after the inevitable stream of reports and rumours.

And there they are at Pinewood, among the English countryhouse gardens and the baronial panelling of the Rank Organisation's stronghold, re-creating West Egg in the 1920s. Visiting the studio for other purposes, it was tantalising to realise that Jay Gatsby's swimming pool was just over the hedge—the more so because they were that day filming, it seemed, the scene in which Gatsby is shot by the vengeful garage proprietor Wilson (Scott Wilson), as he floats in the pool on his air mattress. An occasional faint pop drifted over the hedge, like a very distant gunshot. Robert Redford was later to be seen walking away with a towel draped round his neck, looking as though he were coming off the Centre Court after a hard set.

Walking round the Pinewood lot, actually in search of the admirable exterior sets (a well-weathered stretch of Vatican wall; a Swedish farmyard) for Anthony Harvey's *The Abdication*, one was suddenly pulled up short. There, covering a couple of hundred yards or so of the lot, was the derelict valley of ashes, halfway between West Egg and New York, the site of Wilson's garage and of the fatal car accident. Sagging telegraph wires dangled over the ashy crags, Fitzgerald's 'fantastic farm where ashes grew like wheat into ridges and hills.' A poster along the road advertised a Hudson River steamer trip; a 1920s Coca Cola girl simpered pinkly from a hoarding; the ominous, painted eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg brooded over the dumping ground. Only one building, almost dwarfed by the ash hills: the little squat grey block of Wilson's garage, with a couple of battered petrol pumps providing the only note of colour.

On a blazing August afternoon, this little empty strip of black wasteland, brilliantly put together

by the production designer, John Box, to give an effect of space and desolation, produced an extraordinary impact of alien melancholy. In the eccentric, but not absolutely disastrous, 1949 version of the novel, in which Alan Ladd played Gatsby and Betty Field was a memorable Daisy, it was Shelley Winters who ran out of Wilson's garage under the wheels of the yellow Rolls Royce. In Jack Clayton's film, Karen Black plays poor, silly, greedy Myrtle Wilson. Out there on the backlot, with the summer afternoon traffic running along the road by the studio, just a few yards away, one had the deeply disconcerting feeling of waiting for a hit-and-run accident in a novel written nearly fifty years ago.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

Siegel's Bluff

On a hot August morning in a cramped room overlooking Covent Garden, Don Siegel was directing the last London segments of *Drabble*, an espionage thriller involving kidnapping and arms trafficking, which he is shooting on an eleven week schedule in England and France. Although Siegel has visited this country many times (he attended Jesus College, Cambridge before the war), *Drabble* is his first British movie. It stars Michael Caine as a British agent who comes under suspicion from all sides and finally decides to go it alone when his son is kidnapped. Almost the entire picture is being shot on location, and after a few days near Brighton the unit was going over to Paris for a long session in some wine vaults by the Seine. *Drabble* is the first of three major productions in Europe by those two fugitives from 20th Century-Fox, Richard Zanuck and David Brown, and it will be the first picture from Siegel since he completed *Charley Varrick* last year.

Siegel seems to be delighted by the following he has in this country. I asked him what it was like to be working here: 'It really makes no difference to me whether I'm working in America, Britain or Africa... I'm in a fog most of the day anyway.' In conversation he adopts a kind of ironical pessimism which seems to reflect all those years in the Fifties when, for some reason, he considered himself a failure. 'If you're as bad a director as I am, you have to have good assistants,' he says with amused resignation, but this wry modesty rapidly disappears when he actually gets down to the job of directing. To watch Siegel supervise even the smallest take is to be amazed by the amount of discipline he exerts over every aspect of the production.

On this occasion the Covent Garden room was supposedly a secret service H.Q. and the desks were stacked with Ministry of Defence writing paper. Sporting his celebrated floppy woollen, the director consulted with several

technicians before taking the cast through a line by line rehearsal of a scene in which Donald Pleasence is remonstrating with his junior employees. The pressure was on Siegel to dispose of what was effectively a link sequence as speedily as possible, because the unit had to be out of the building that night. But without much noticeable delay, he managed to instruct every actor on how to handle it, including those who weren't even speaking lines. His attitude to anyone who was being less than serious in his approach was irate enough to get immediate results, but there was no hint of the tyrant in his tone. If one had assumed that a director who learned his craft in 'B' pictures might be unresponsive to the needs of actors, it was obviously necessary to think again. Siegel's long and tough apprenticeship seems to have given him a notable flexibility of approach.

During a break Siegel told me that he is still as proud of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* as he ever was (which is not surprising in view of the film's ever accumulating reputation). 'It's one of the few pictures I've made that means anything, despite the fact that it was given such a terrible title' (the original title was *Sleep No More*). 'I thought some people were pods and I think it's even more true now with America the way it is.' But it remains surprising that in the course of nearly 20 years Siegel has never attempted another science fiction or horror subject. He said it was something he often thought about: 'I guess honestly I'd be scared to do a film like that now. I've been offered them, but the industry regards these films in a certain way.'

Siegel admits that he feels terribly lucky to have broken away from the low budget productions which were his bread and butter for so many years. The break came with *Madigan* in 1968, and then *Coogan's Bluff* marked the start of his long and remunerative association with Clint Eastwood. In view of the more reactionary aspects of *Dirty Harry*, I asked him if he'd still consider himself a liberal. He thought about it a long time: 'I've been called many things in my time... but definitely if I had to call myself anything I would call myself a liberal.'

He went back to supervise the take, leaving one to ponder whether the politics of *Drabble* would bear out the affiliation. And then on cue, one of the technicians wheeled in a shining and elaborate piece of apparatus whose arrival Siegel had been eagerly anticipating. It was a giant paper shredder of the kind that has played such a key part in the activities of Magruder, Stans, Mitchell and Co. during the notorious Campaign to Re-Elect the President. Admirers of Don Siegel, who fondly remember the subversive tone of his earliest movies, may be interested to know that *Drabble* looks like being the first official post-Watergate espionage thriller.

DAVID PIRIE

New Writers

A few years ago, Broadway successes and bestselling novels were considered by Hollywood as 'presold' material, relatively safe commercial bets, even if the prices often seemed inflationary. *Rosemary's Baby* is the classic example. When the witchcraft thriller was still in manuscript, William Castle bought the rights for \$100,000—with an additional \$50,000 to Ira Levin if his book was a bestseller. The *Rosemary's Baby* filmed by Polanski for \$2.3 million earned \$30 million worldwide.

Now the emphasis has changed: new writers and original scripts are being aggressively marketed. What has soured corporate Hollywood on 'hot properties' are such financial disasters as *Topaz*, *The Salzburg Connection*, *Portnoy's Complaint* and *The Other*—all at one time or another high in the bestseller charts. Studios still buy expensive books—Paramount has just purchased Dorothy Uhnak's *Law and Order*. But Arthur Hailey and Harold Robbins have yet to find takers for their latest bestsellers, *Wheels* and *Betsy*. Also, studios still have on their shelves such expensive stage hits as *Hadrian VII* and *Coco*. If literary agents can still flimflam producers into six-figure purchases of 'red hot' novels, the heart is really no longer in it. The shift is to original scripts written by people who have a sense of what the under-30 audience wants, often recent graduates of university cinema departments.

People like John Milius, at 28 a gun expert, champion surfer and health freak, who sold *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean* to Paul Newman for \$300,000 and is now directing his own *Dillinger*. Milius calls himself 'Hollywood's resident expert on legendary Americans.' He graduated in 1967 from the USC film school, got a job at American International Pictures and wrote the motorcycle picture *The Devil's 8*, and then did both *Jeremiah Johnson* and *Evel Knievel* as original screenplays.

Paul Schrader (26) and William Kerby and Tom Rickman (both 25) are also doing well. Warners bought Schrader's *Yakuza*, a satire on an ageing American gangster in the Tokyo underworld. The reported price: \$300,000 and a percentage of the profits. Kerby sold *Double Zero* to Universal, and Rickman in the past year has sold three originals, including *W.W. and the Dixie Dance King* to Fox. Other originals to have fetched hefty prices are Marc Norman's *Oklahoma Crude* (Columbia and Stanley Kramer) and Floyd Mutrux's *Freebie and the Bean* (Warner).

'My pictures are sentimental and idealistic,' says Milius. 'I deal with friendships, chivalry and courage—not just "guts", but bigger than life courage.' Oddly, he adds, it has only now occurred to the producing establishment that people who see Broadway plays and read bestselling novels are not the people who go to movies.

AXEL MADSEN

ASTA NIELSEN



Asta Nielsen as Hamlet (1920)

THE SILENT MUSE

Robert C. Allen

Asta Nielsen died in May 1972 at the age of 90, sixty-two years after she first appeared on the screen. This month the National Film Theatre is showing a tribute to the great Danish actress, a retrospective of the films she made in Denmark and Germany between 1910 and 1932. The season has been arranged by Robert Allen, who writes here about Asta Nielsen's career. Elsa Gress, the Danish writer and journalist, who knew Nielsen in her retirement, contributes a personal reminiscence.

She tore a piece of quivering human flesh out and held it toward the light for all to see. Her amazing face had toward the end a tragic power without equal.

Thomas Krag

She is all. She is the drunkard's vision and the hermit's dream.

Guillaume Apollinaire

It was Asta Nielsen's first film performance in the 1910 Danish film *Afgrunden* (*The Abyss*) which inspired these panegyrics. These two poets were the first of many to laud the talents of the great Danish actress during her twenty-two-year career. Her seventy-six films reveal a consistently high level of performance and a vast range of characters which made her one of the first, if not the first, and one of the greatest, if not the greatest, international screen stars of the 1910s and 1920s. Siegfried Kracauer called her 'the most fascinating personality of the primitive era.' Lotte Eisner in *The Haunted Screen* refers to her as 'an intellectual of great refinement . . . the quintessence, the epitome of her era.' Bela Balazs wrote, 'Dip the flags before her, dip the flags before her, for she is unique.' To all but a few film historians and scholars, however, Asta Nielsen's death in 1972 was noted, if at all, as merely the passing of a vaguely familiar figure from the cinema's dim beginnings. Sixty-three years ago, in Apollinaire's words, 'a new light seemed to shine from the screen.'

Asta Nielsen had been working in the Danish theatre for nearly a decade before she made *The Abyss*. Since reading Ibsen's *Brand* at the age of eight, she had dreamed of being a great tragedienne. But the Copenhagen theatre directors would only cast her in character roles. She would not, they felt, be accepted as a leading lady. Her mouth was too thin, her nose was crooked, she had no figure, her voice was not a female alto but a male tenor. So in 1910, after years of playing an eighty-year-old farmer's wife one night and a French coquette the next, she had little to lose by accepting an offer from Urban Gad, a theatre art director, to act in a film he had written for her. Gad had secured 8,000 kronor backing from a theatre-owner friend—exactly enough for eight days shooting. *The Abyss* was made during the summer of 1910 in a deserted jailyard, on the streets of Copenhagen, and in the Frederiksberg Gardens. Only the cameraman, Alfred Lind (who also thought Nielsen should not have been given a leading role), had ever made a film, and he and Gad frequently quarrelled during the shooting.

Gad and Nielsen made no secret of the fact that they were making the film to attract the notice of the Copenhagen theatre establishment. But the theatre directors boycotted the premiere, held at the Kosmorama cinema on September 12th, 1910. Director and star hardly had time to commiserate with each other. As Asta Nielsen recalls in her autobiography:

'Soon the film was being shown all over the world, and everywhere everyone agreed that . . . a turning point had been reached in the history of the cinema. The papers which had never reviewed films before now praised this first proof of film's claim to being an



'The Abyss'



'Engelien'



'Das Liebes ABC'

Below: 'Joyless Street'



art form. In spite of the film being distributed without our names being mentioned on it, my name everywhere rose like a phoenix out of the ashes. Letters from all corners of the world began to pour in to me, the adventure of the film had become my reality.*

In *The Abyss*, Nielsen plays Magda, a young music teacher who becomes engaged to Knud, an engineer. On a trip to the country to meet his parents, her eye is caught by an advertisement for a travelling circus featuring the dashing, chap-clad cowboy, Mr. Rudolf. She persuades Knud to take her to the circus, and Mr. Rudolf is struck by his attractive admirer. That night, while rhapsodising over the debonair entertainer, Magda is startled to see him climbing through her bedroom window. With a profession of everlasting love and a fiery kiss, Mr. Rudolf carries her away to join his nomadic life. Hero soon turns to villain, however, as we learn that Mr. Rudolf showers his affections on any female within striking distance. All attempts to contain her roving lover having failed, Magda seizes his lasso and coils it round him. Then, in what for 1910 must have been a scandalously erotic dance, she declares both her passion and her desperation, grinding her body against his, her expression an ecstatic trance. Apart from temporary immobility, however, Magda's dance has little effect on Mr. Rudolf. Because of his extra-curricular activities he is soon fired from the circus, and Magda finds herself supporting an unemployed cowboy by playing the piano in the park. One day her former fiancé happens along and arranges to meet her. Mr. Rudolf bursts in and begins striking Magda, and in a fit of rage she stabs him to death. The final shot shows Magda being led down the stairs to a waiting police wagon.

The plot of *The Abyss* is memorable for two reasons. First, it contains the standard elements of successful films from 1910 to now: sex and violence. Secondly, its theme of the bored, middle-class fun-seeker lured to ruin by the glittering world of cabaret and circus is the prototype for a number of later films, particularly German films of the Twenties: *The Street*, *Joyless Street*, *The Blue Angel*, etc. But even in 1910 *The Abyss* would hardly have stirred a ripple of interest had it not been for the acting of Asta Nielsen. Her style was in direct opposition to the reigning technique of exaggerated gesticulation. After killing Mr. Rudolf, for example, instead of indulging in wild breast-beating she walks towards the camera in the last scene in an almost somnambulistic trance, her expression hardly changing throughout the sustained shot; yet—as Thomas Krag said—her face has 'a tragic power without equal'. Hers was a restrained, naturalistic style, her frugal use of external gesture riveting attention on her expressive face. To quote Apollinaire again: 'She laughs like a girl completely happy, and her eyes know of things so tender and shy that one dare not speak of them.'

Even in her first film she demonstrated

knowledge of her characters down to, as she called it, 'the last externals'. This knowledge, coupled with her great improvisational talents, manifests itself in the illuminating though unobtrusive touch which pushes the character into three dimensions. The rope-dance in *The Abyss*, for instance, was largely improvisational, and the combination of ecstatic mask and frenzied dance perfectly sums up the character of Magda at that point in the action. In *Engelien* (*The Little Angel*, 1913), her most successful comedy film, Nielsen plays an eighteen-year-old girl contemplating drowning herself over unrequited love for her uncle. In the midst of writing her final letter to him, she pauses to pick at a pimple on her knee—a simple touch which sustains the comedy of a potentially morbid situation while setting up the audience for the next scene, in which she defers her suicide because the river is too cold.

The success, both critical and financial, of *The Abyss* soon came to the attention of Paul Davidsohn, Berlin theatre-owner and President of Projektions A.G. Union (PAGU), a forerunner of UFA. Davidsohn made Gad and Nielsen a handsome offer to go to Berlin to make two films, with an option for an extension of their contract. *Nachtfalter* (*The Moth*, 1911) and *Heisses Blut* (*Burning Blood*, 1911) repeated the success of *The Abyss*, and the couple, now married, moved to Berlin.

Nielsen made over thirty films for Union between 1911 and 1914, all but a few written and directed by Urban Gad. These four years were a self-imposed and self-supervised apprenticeship: her goal was the development of a 'silent language' which would 'make the spirit visible', and she worked towards it in everything from her selection of roles to her stern self-criticism. Most of the films, made in series of eight, were written during the winter and shot in summer. Nielsen worked closely with Gad in the selection of material—choosing themes, characters and locales as diverse as possible to provide a constant challenge to her versatility. During the last three months of 1911, for example, four Nielsen films were released: *In dem grossen Augenblick* (*The Great Moment*), in which she plays a starving mother forced to give up her child for adoption; *Zigeunerblut* (*Gypsy Blood*), in which she is an unscrupulous gypsy who marries a count and then runs away with their son; *Der fremde Vogel* (*Strange Bird*), where she is the daughter of a rich American who falls in love with a barge-man; and *Die Verräterin* (*The Traitor*), the story of a French nobleman's daughter who turns traitress to save the life of her lover, a German lieutenant.

Once the characters had been selected and the scripts written, Nielsen began the laborious process of 'becoming' the characters. 'Months in advance,' she recalled, 'I lived myself into the persons I was to represent. I prepared all the externals from the lines of the costumes to the characterising props which, in an art where the word is silent, play a still part in the theatre.' In addition to her own preparations, there were other, more mundane matters. She convinced Davidsohn to spend money hiring competent supporting actors, rather than recruiting them from a café known as the

*Asta Nielsen, *Den Tiende Muse* (*The Silent Muse*), Gyldendal, 1945, translated by David Wright. All Asta Nielsen quotes, unless otherwise noted, are from *Den Tiende Muse* and are reprinted by permission.

'Kinobörse', as was the practice. She also persuaded him to withdraw 'the most horrid market posters showing me in gruesome scenes that were in none of the films,' and to hire artists to do the advertisements. And there were always battles with the censors. A garter was revealed for a second in *Engelien*, her screen death was removed from one film for fear it might over-excite the audience, and in another an entire scene was cut because it took place in a hospital where there was a crucifix above her bed.

Her efforts were rewarded. By the end of her contract with Union, in the summer of 1914, her name was known all over the world. She was receiving fan letters from England and South America, and had cinemas named for her in Düsseldorf, Nagasaki and San Francisco. Her films had begun to reach America early in 1912, and an article in the *Moving Picture World*, announcing the purchase of six of her films by the Tournament Film Company of Toledo, Ohio, referred to her as 'the great German emotional actress' whose followers 'are firm in their belief that she possesses all the talents and abilities of Miss Marlowe, Mrs. Campbell and Madame Bernhardt rolled into one.' Judging from the trade paper reviews, the films did well.

Nielsen's success in the United States was abruptly halted by the outbreak of the First World War. It was to be seven years before her films would be seen again on American or English screens. Still very much a Dane, and for the most part apolitical, she left Germany at the beginning of the war and, after a cruise to South America and the United States, settled in Copenhagen. She had not been forgotten in Europe, however; both French and German soldiers decorated their trenches with her picture.

In 1916 she returned to Germany to make a series of films for Neutral Films, of which the best were *Das Liebes ABC* (*The ABC of Love*) and *Das Eskimobaby* (*The Eskimo Baby*), both comedies. She found comedy difficult; she remembered being 'completely devoid of any trace of humour at all' during her stage training in Copenhagen. It was more likely that her sense of the comic was buried, requiring the ego-boost of *The Abyss* and the self-confidence of continued success to bring it to the surface. What we see on the screen is far from forced, and her acting is so self-assured that one might think she had come into film after years in the music-hall. The character which emerges from her comedies (*Jugend und Tollheit*, *Zapatas Bande*, *Vortreppe-Hintertreppe*, *Das Liebes ABC* and *Eskimobaby* among others) is the unstoppable extrovert, constantly plotting and endowed with more energy and determination than all the other characters put together.

In most of the comedies, the humour springs from an incongruity between the character Nielsen plays and the situation. In *Eskimobaby* she plays an Eskimo brought back by a young Arctic explorer to his upper-class home. In *The ABC of Love* she is a young woman who teaches her Caspar Milquetoast boyfriend the ways of the world by going out on the town disguised as his brother. In *Engelien* she is an eighteen-year-old girl who has to masquerade as a fourteen-year-old when her uncle comes to visit. Whether as a man, a child, an Eskimo or a highway robber (*Zapatas Bande*), she usually



'Der Absturz': Nielsen in an Expressionist setting

invades a stuffy, middle-class environment and turns it on its ear—not through burlesque or slapstick but by behaving more or less normally for the character she is playing. Had she decided to concentrate on comedy rather than tragedy and melodrama, she might well have developed into one of the finest comedienne of her age.

Her first film after the war was *Rausch*, an adaptation of Strindberg's *Brot och Brot* directed by Ernst Lubitsch. The script, written by Lubitsch and Hans Krahly, bore little resemblance to the play, and Nielsen appeared under protest, having tried to extricate herself from her contract. She refused to participate in the film's 'touch', a

scene from *Paradise Lost* with her and Alfred Abel performing nude. But in spite of their differences Nielsen remembered Lubitsch as the most talented director she had worked with. He had 'just that artistic conception of technology or technical conception of art which is the genuine talent of a good director of films.'

In 1920 Nielsen formed her own production company, Art Films, and chose as its first venture a version of *Hamlet* with herself in the title role. The idea had come from the book *The Mystery of Hamlet* by Edward Vining, who suggested that Hamlet had actually been a woman forcibly raised as a man so that a male should succeed the throne in time of war. The script also borrowed

'Erdgeist': Nielsen as Lulu



from the 13th century *Historiae Danicae* by the Danish bishop Saxo Grammaticus and from a German play, *Fratricide Punished*.

Nielsen had played men before and she had played women playing men, but only in comedies. The challenge in *Hamlet* was to play a sexually ambivalent role for its tragedy. Her litheness and energy lend credence to her maleness as a decidedly unbrooming Hamlet; but we are never allowed to forget that Hamlet not only is a woman but has the feelings and desires of a woman—desires which can never be fulfilled. The mood of the film, directed by Svend Gade and Heinz Schall and beautifully photographed by Curt Courant and Axel Graatkjaer, is an unusual mixture of outdoor epic and dimly lit interior intimacy. The costumes and sets are lavish and the backgrounds filled with extras. Battle scenes and banquets anticipate later costume films, while some of the interiors have the shadowy gloom of Expressionist works.

Despite some unfavourable opinions—some critics could not bear to think of Hamlet without Shakespeare; others could not suspend their disbelief to accept a female Hamlet ('She must have enjoyed an extraordinary amount of privacy for the period,' said Oswald Blakeston in *Close Up*)—the film was a great success. Both the *New York Times* and the National Board of Review selected it as one of the best films of the year, the latter noting that 'Asta Nielsen's art is a mature art that makes the curly-headed girls and painted hussies and tear-drenched mothers of most of our native film dramas as fantastic for adult consumption as a reading diet restricted to the Elsie books and Mother Goose.'

One of Asta Nielsen's closest friends in Berlin during the early Twenties was the actor Paul Wegener. They collaborated on several films, most notably Arthur von Gerlach's production of Stendhal's *Vanina*, written by Carl Mayer. *Vanina*, designed by Walter Reimann, who began his career with *Caligari*, is the most Expressionist of Nielsen's films, full of shadows, maze-like corridors and dank dungeons. Wegener plays a demoniac governor whose daughter (Nielsen) falls in love with the leader of a revolutionary group (Paul Hartmann). The rebel is imprisoned, but Vanina frees him, only to find, after leading him through seemingly interminable, labyrinthine corridors, that the governor is waiting for them; with a sinister smirk he returns the rebel to his doom and leaves his daughter tugging vainly at the cross-bar of the huge dungeon door.

Nielsen brilliantly adapts her essentially naturalistic style to the demands of an emotionally claustrophobic plot. As Lotte Eisner says, 'If this film is more astonishing for us today than many others, the reason is that Nielsen's acting is intensely modern—her eyes, her hands, the sweep of her figure betraying an immense sorrow, give a violent intensity and resonance to this *Kammerspiele* of souls.' The final, full-figure shot of Vanina in a shimmering white gown standing out in sharp relief against the black walls and door sticks in the mind like a screaming figure from a Munch painting.

Another outstanding film of this period was *Erdgeist*, directed by Leopold Jessner. Based on the play by Frank Wedekind, the



Nielsen as bandit in 'Zapatas Bande'

film features one of the most fascinating characters of the German screen: Lulu, the ultimate *femme fatale*, the heartless siren whose life is spent in gratification of an insatiable physical passion. To those who have only seen her photograph it is perhaps difficult to imagine Asta Nielsen as a sex symbol; but from the fragments of *Erdgeist* which have been preserved it is easy to understand why some of her admirers regarded her as the most erotic screen actress of her time. True, on appearance alone, she does not have the immediate attraction of a Garbo or a Dietrich; but her not unattractive features, combined with an intense power of expression, make her Lulu just as erotic as Dietrich's garter-belted Lola Lola. When Lulu yields to the caresses of her ruined lover, we see in her half-opened eyes not only her boredom and disgust with her exhausted lover, but also the attraction which ruined him.

By the mid-1920s, films of the calibre of *Vanina* and *Erdgeist* were becoming scarce. Many studios had fallen into the hands of greedy distributors, and American interests had invaded the German industry, reducing some domestic producers to grinding out 'quota films' necessary for American imports. As Asta Nielsen described the situation:

'The films I was forced to act in for a while were not only pure film-hawking, but were ground out in the studios at breakneck speed for reasons of economy. Often the photographer was not allowed to adjust his lighting and long shots and close-ups whirled among each other in the same constant light. The same decoration served widely different interiors, only from another angle of view. The result . . . was technically at the 1908 level.'

It was fortunate, therefore, that G. W. Pabst, wanting to add some 'names' to his production of *Joyless Street* (1925) after deciding on an unknown (Garbo) for one of the leads, turned to Asta Nielsen and Werner Krauss.

Nielsen's role is a development of her

Magda in *The Abyss*. She plays Maria Lechner, a girl caught up in the poverty of postwar Vienna who sells herself to a rich speculator so that her boyfriend can make a profit on the stock exchange. She discovers him being unfaithful, however, strangles her rival, and resigns herself to being 'the speculator's kept woman, letting the police think her boyfriend committed the murder. But a spark of conscience returns and she confesses the crime. Running parallel with the Maria plot is that of Greta Rumfort (Garbo), who flirts with the twilight world of Mrs. Greifer's nightclub but never succumbs, thanks to the somewhat *deus ex machina* appearance of an American Red Cross lieutenant.

The real poignancy of the film comes from Maria, who although she does sell out to the parasites of society, shows herself to be the only really moral character by choosing to accept the consequences of her actions. Whereas the moral nadir of *The Abyss* occurred with the rope-dance, in *Joyless Street* it comes in a brilliant scene in which the speculator enters a shady hotel room accompanied by a frizzy-haired woman in a see-through, sequined dress. The woman turns towards the camera and is seen to be Maria, a vacant, lifeless expression on her gaudily painted face.

Because of its mutilation by censors in various countries, *Joyless Street* did little to enhance Nielsen's career. Her role was apparently completely excised in the American version, and the programme notes of the London Film Society (its only British screening until 1935) bear witness to its butchering: 'The action is so complex and tangled that there is little opportunity for detailed characterisation.' After an almost two-year absence from the screen, during which she toured in a play, she returned to do the last of the 'street' films, *Dirnen-tragödie* (*Tragedy of the Street*, 1927), for Bruno Rahn. Nielsen plays Auguste, an ageing prostitute, first seen sitting at her shabby dressing-table before a cracked mirror applying shoe-polish to her greying hair with a toothbrush. She falls in love with a middle-class young man, but he is seduced by a younger prostitute after Auguste has spent her life savings trying to achieve some vestige of respectability by buying a bakery. Rather than see her lover ruined, she persuades her pimp (Oscar Homolka) to kill her. The young man runs home to cry in his mother's lap.

Many regard this as Nielsen's best and most sustained dramatic performance. Certainly her representation of a woman fighting off the approach of age has an inevitable ring of truth—Nielsen was forty-six when the picture was made. The simplicity of this, her last great silent film, provides a showcase for the display of her 'silent language'. In the early scenes, rejuvenated by love for the young man, she reaches back towards the innocence of Magda in *The Abyss*—an effect made more powerful by her age and the accoutrements of her profession. She learns of her friend's treachery by hearing the sounds of the seduction through her locked bedroom door, and in a shot matching the desperate isolation of the end of *Vanina*, she pounds vainly on the door.

The sound film made its debut in Germany in 1929, but Asta Nielsen was reluctant to

try the medium, feeling that the stage rather than the screen was the place for theatrical dialogue. In 1932, however, she agreed to play the role of Vera Holck in *Unmögliche Liebe* (Impossible Love, directed by Erich Waschneck). According to *The Silent Muse*, the original novel dealt with a middle-aged woman artist who falls in love with an elderly sculptor, marries him and lives happily. In the film version the sculptor became a young man with a deranged wife, and the 'impossible love' ended tragically. Once bitten, twice shy: Asta Nielsen retired from films. She continued to live in Germany until 1936; when she returned to Copenhagen—not before, she claimed, refusing an offer from the Führer himself to head her own studio.

While her screen life faded into the limbo of a retired star, Asta Nielsen's last thirty-five years remained full and active. She wrote short stories, two volumes of autobiography, and articles on film, politics and social matters. After the war she unsuccessfully applied thirteen times for a licence to open a cinema in Denmark. The official reason for her being turned down was her advanced years, but there was also the threat of a scandal involving the release of certain 'evidence' that she had once been too friendly with the Nazis. Although she had never been even vaguely sympathetic to the Nazi cause, the government bowed to the pressure.

In 1968, Asta Nielsen made a short documentary of her career with Poul Reumert, Mr. Rudolf of *The Abyss*. In the final scene she sits among the art treasures of her Copenhagen apartment and says, 'I am only waiting to die,' a single tear trickling down her cheek. After the scene was shot she is said to have told the cameraman, 'I hope you got that. I don't think I have another screen tear left in me.'

DIE ASTA

a personal impression
by Elsa Gress

Asta—die Asta—the Diva, before and above them all, was not just alive and kicking from the moment of birth to that of death at ninety, but was also in all respects the opposite of what the myth had made of her.

This myth, evolved around her screen image in the 1910s and 1920s, was avidly absorbed in later decades by her compatriots, who felt guilty at not using her talents and barely tolerating her presence. It painted her as the unfeeling, man-eating monster of some of her films—notably her Lulu in *Erdegeist*—and added legends of her self-absorbed, misanthropic character and affected life-style. She wasn't even spared rumours of having colluded with leading Nazis, since she was still working in Germany when they took over.

None of this has any bearing on reality, though one can understand how some of

this malignant untruth arose. She was certainly not the true-to-type prima donna, capricious, inane and humourless. And if she was not the usual dumb star, but a bright, strong personality—well then, she must surely be heartless and the rest of it. It is the old Romantic idea of the incompatibility of heart and head. But heart and head are regularly joined in great artists; and to prove that they were so joined in Asta, it is enough to offer—beyond the testimony of a friend—reference to her work in three fields of expression. Where, if not in Asta herself, was the indomitable soul of her films; where was the clear intelligence and compassion of her autobiography, *The Silent Muse*; where was the observation, the sense of colour and composition, the baroque humour, of the bright collages she did in her retirement? As to her life-style, it may be hard for people brought up to consider clinical sterility the height of good taste to



Asta Nielsen in her eighties. Below: a collage self-portrait



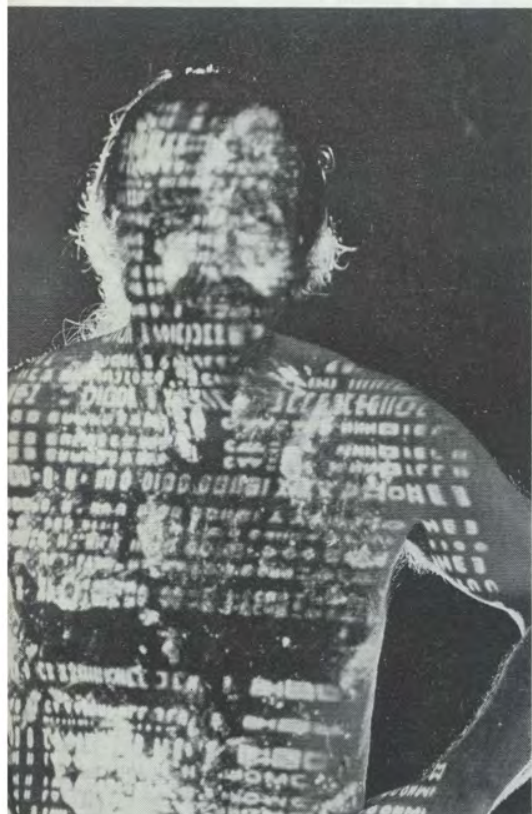
understand that her 'theatrical' home, full of baroque art, was a natural milieu to her, an extension of her personality. But it was none the less so. And the most vicious charge was also the most untruthful. Her attitude to Nazism and racism was wholly negative from the start.

She was difficult, all right. Difficult as the true artist is, and as the deeply honest person is, and as the combination of the two is to the second degree. Mercilessly clear-headed, sharp, witty and thoroughly incorruptible, she was clearly not cut out to be a popular figure, no matter how far her fame went as a star. She was also one of those rare, wholly independent women who, without regard to prejudices and patterns, run their lives and their careers, with some providential help but not much. If she wanted a child but not a husband, she had it and not him, no matter what the world thought—and it disapproved strongly around 1902. Husbands were dispensable, until at 88 she found one that wasn't, and knew it. Work was self-chosen and necessary. And on top of it she, the Free Woman, the career monster, the relentless artist who refused to divulge one bit of her private life, was for two decades the ultra-feminine erotic image of Europe, desired and admired as the essence of womanhood, madonna and whore in one.

She was the Tenth Muse, not its hand-maiden, the force that shaped the language of the new, raw film medium with her unique blend of intuitive spontaneity and documentary observation. Like no star before or after, she characterised not just the human types she portrayed—from gypsy to *grande dame*, from proletarian girl to upper-class spoilt brat—but also their professions and milieus. Getting into a role was not a matter of learning plots and expressions, but of using her insights as a person continuously observant of life. It was no accident that she spoke so strongly to poets and artists. They could not only admire her as a colleague but passionately identify with her—like Apollinaire, who wrote of her, 'When hatred flames in her eyes, we clench our fists, and when she lifts her eyelids, the stars shine out.' That she had had to overcome terrible handicaps—deafness, and having to turn inside out the tastes of an age—only seemed to strengthen the courage that never left her, even in the sad, long years of retirement.

The remnants of Asta's films, and the thirty-five minute documentary of her career that she made herself, against heavy odds, in 1968 (she was then 86), are far from being all of the living, creative Asta. But they can remind us of her. A kind of poetic justice can even be seen in the fact that only imperfect fragments are left of the work she did in and for the film. For with all the careful work she did, her strength was always in the intense, flowing power, the somnambulistically sure touch, not the painfully sustained, technically conditioned perfection. It takes imagination fully to understand Asta Nielsen; and imagination was what she herself offered, and what those fortunate enough to know her, as a person and as an artist, must bitterly miss and remember, thinking of the difficult old lady who was also the eternally young female Hotspur, so greedy for life and so eager to shape it.

John Boorman's *Zardoz*, filmed in Ireland from his own screenplay, with Sean Connery heading the cast, is an adventure fantasy set 300 years in the future. Irish bogs and ruins provide the background for a Swiftian conflict in which members of an elite Commune, the Vortex, are beset from within by problems of their own immortality and from without by uncontrollable opponents.





JOHN BOORMAN'S

ZARDOZ



ALAIN RESNAIS:

the quest for Harry Dickson



Jean-Raymond de Kremer (Jean Ray). Photograph: André Goeffers

For ten years, when asked what he was going to do next, Alain Resnais replied that he was going to film *The Adventures of Harry Dickson*. He said it in 1959 after *Hiroshima mon Amour*. He said it in 1961 after *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*. And he said it again after *Muriel*, *La Guerre est Finie*, *Loin du Vietnam* and *Je t'aime, je t'aime*.

At the time, critics and film buffs were left in a humiliating state of conjecture by this perennially thwarted dream. Few of them had ever heard the name of Harry Dickson. A detective or a Judex-style avenger, thought the least unenlightened. Researches in bookshops, public libraries and bibliographies, in France, Belgium, Switzerland and even England, yielded no trace. Had Resnais resorted to the old storyteller's device of the manuscript found in a trunk?

Well no, he hadn't. Among collectors of popular literature there are a few who can claim actually to have seen—and some even to have read—certain rather tawdry quarto-size serial instalments published on cheap paper during the 1930s whose illustrated covers, bearing no author's name, carried only the words 'Harry Dickson, the American Sherlock Holmes', and in much smaller letters the title of each episode.

To many, this interest shown by a notoriously intellectual film-maker in penny dreadful characters seems inexplicable. 'It's because of the covers,' is the explanation offered by Anatole Dauman, producer of the film that hasn't yet been made. A sibylline remark, indecipherable unless one knows the real Resnais, unless one discovers the poetry and the passion which underlie the mysteriously cerebral personality of journalistic legend. 'Or the Time of a Recall' is the subtitle to Resnais' masterpiece, *Muriel*; and for *The Adventures of Harry Dickson* it might have been 'or the Recall of a Time'. For with this film Resnais was preparing to

explore his own memory instead of other people's, searching for a poetic way to develop on the screen the images of his own past. Not the images of life as he lived it, but of life as he dreamed it—the images suppressed by the adult mind.

The meeting between Harry Dickson and the future film-maker took place during the 1930s in the Breton town of Vannes, where Resnais was born in 1922 and where his father had a chemist's shop. Breton folklore and family affinities were to breed, if not a complicity, at least an instinctive feeling for the fantastic in the chemist's son. His grandmother's sister was renowned for having one day seen from her window the funeral procession of a woman who was thought to be in excellent health, and of whose death none of the family had heard for the very good reason that it did not take place until a week later. The real procession then passed by exactly as foreseen. Young Alain also often heard the story of the strange adventure which befell his grandfather's uncle. A ship's captain, the uncle

had surprised a ghost in the act of writing some figures in his log. These, as the intrigued captain hastened to verify, indicated the latitude and longitude position of a sinking ship. In the bow of the foremost lifeboat bearing the shipwrecked sailors to safety was a man resembling the ghost. This curious incident is included in a hefty tome compiled by Anatole Le Braz: *La Légende de la Mort chez les Bretons Armoricaïns*. The book was young Alain's favourite reading, and he read it twice a year, during the Easter and Christmas holidays. It is still in his library.

At the opposite end of the scale, the boy was also under the spell of Sherlock Holmes, admiring his wit, fastidiousness, rigorous turn of mind, and the sense of theatre which kept the secret closely guarded until the moment of its final unmasking. For the young Resnais, the tenant of 221B Baker Street eclipsed all his rivals: Nat Pinkerton, or Nick Carter 'the great American detective'. He had read these dime novels in the original brochures issued in France prior to 1914 by the German publisher Eichler. But he was fascinated by the evocative quality of the Nick Carter covers and the dynamism of the attitudes depicted on them, immutable though they were. A fascination which left its mark on the hieratic composition of certain scenes in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* which are quite immaterial to the action but very revealing of the director's preoccupations. But a discovery made quite by chance and resulting, as Resnais himself put it, in love at first sight, completely eclipsed Holmes and his derivatives.

In June or July 1934, at the paper kiosk

in Vannes railway station, Resnais noticed for the first time a publication very similar in appearance to the Nick Carter series. The rather old-fashioned wrappers bore an alluring title, *The Phantom of the Red Ruins*. It was No. 67 of the fortnightly series 'Harry Dickson, the American Sherlock Holmes'. Resnais was to remain a devoted reader until the series ceased publication in May 1940—though not without some difficulty. The station kiosk received copies at irregular intervals, so that he sometimes missed an issue. To fill the gaps in his collection he was obliged to wait for the next trip to Paris, where he knew of a kiosk in the Place du Châtelet whose walls were lined with old Harry Dickson, Nat Pinkerton and Nick Carter issues.

So, love at first sight. From the moment he entered his life, 'the American Sherlock Holmes' performed for Resnais the miracle of integrating the realistic action and brilliant technique of Holmes into a fantastic world worthy of Anatole Le Braz: in *The Phantom of the Red Ruins* he unmasked the dark doings of a pair of vampires. Enchanted by the wild fantasy of the story, the young Resnais judged it both better constructed and better written than the Carter and Pinkerton series.

Harry Dickson's kinship with his famous forbear is inescapable, even extending beyond their infallible detective genius to a certain physical resemblance: the inset portrait of Harry Dickson used on the covers from 1931 onwards suggests Basil Rathbone—who in 1939 was to become the cinema's Sherlock Holmes. The celebrated Englishman lives at 221B Baker Street. His American colleague is a neighbour at 111B. Like her counterpart at 221B, the landlady at 111B, Mrs. Crown, wavers between admiration and disapproval of her tenant. Both good ladies are lavish of domestic advice and the cup that cheers. That old fogey Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard is matched by another rather more respectful and compliant old fogey, Superintendent Goodfield of Scotland Yard.

But Dickson, spared the megalomania and haughty self-assurance of Holmes, is altogether more cordial and approachable. Less cerebral, more pragmatic, he too may consult files of newspaper cuttings but he uses neither cocaine nor violin to sharpen his wits. In any case he prefers field-work to armchair detection. Using disguise more frequently and rather better than Holmes, he is at home in every milieu and equal to every circumstance. He does not hesitate to feign love, or even wedlock (*The Illustrious Sons of the Zodiac*). He can even, on occasion, fall in love (*The Spider's Gang*, *The Curse of the Foyles*). Dispositions which the tenant of 221B would have condemned out of hand.

Dickson of course had to have a rival worthy of him, a Moriarty of his own. This was 'Professor Flax, a monster in human form'. But he now fought this dead enemy only in his memory, or through his daughter Georgette Cuvelier, a highly redoubtable and seductive criminal and the only adversary who ever managed to bring him to the brink of defeat.

Another difference is that Dickson is not only cordial but almost paternal to his faithful assistant. The adolescent Tom Wills—young enough to pose as a woman if

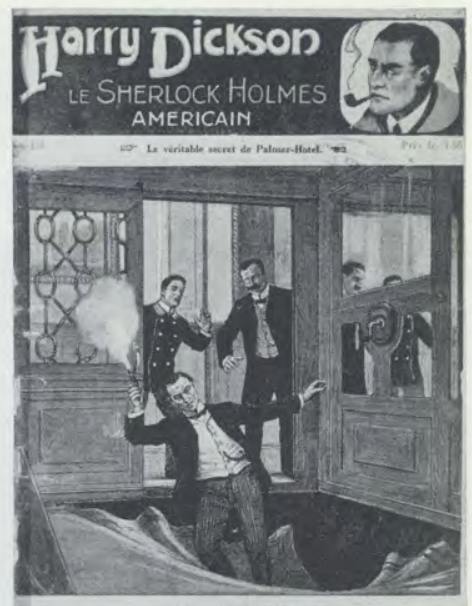
need be—has neither Watson's biographer's role nor his dignity. But he plays a much more active part in his master's adventures. Courting every danger astride his motor-cycle or at the wheel of a sports car, he plunges blindly into the fog with which Dickson, like his model, envelops his deductions. Every bit as uncommunicative as Holmes, Dickson confesses to the singer Eva Merrill in *Stall 27*: 'My little weakness, you see, is to excite incomprehension until zero hour'—'Zero hour?'—'The moment when darkness is dispelled.' When zero hour does arrive, however, he contents himself with some miraculous revelations which clear up the mystery, but allow one to follow neither his train of thought nor the logical stages of his enquiry. What use, however, would he have for logic? For in his adventures Harry Dickson faces the inconceivable and the irrational.

Of course many of his adventures do conform to the criteria of detective literature: in *Room 113* he even tackled the classic mystery of a locked room crime. Much more frequent, however, are the stories in which a semblance of detective investigation is enveloped in an atmosphere of bizarre fantasy developed to the point of obsession. The subject of these stories is not so much the crime itself as an exploration of the nightmarish malaise that surrounds, and sometimes occasions, it.

In these adventures Harry Dickson tackles adversaries quite unknown to the ordinary run of detective. A hypnotising octopus (*The Three Circles of Terror*). A zombie (*The Terrible Night at the Zoo*). 'A Thing of Terror' (*The Mystery of the Seven Madmen*). A flying lizard (*The Penguin Affair*). A vampiric Buddha (*The Road to Heaven*). The god Baal (*The Street of the Missing Head*). The dragon Wuku (*The Fearful Nights of Fellston*). A flame-throwing automaton (*The Man in the Silver Mask*). And vampires (*The Night of the Marsh*, *The Seven Little Chairs*, *The Garden of the Furies*, *The Monster Grass*, *The Mystery of Bantam House*, *The Phantom of the Red Ruins*).

The war is unremitting, waged according to the simple Manichean law of good and evil. Harry Dickson's omnipotent infallibility, unlike Holmes's, cannot be explained as the result of ordinary human reason developed to an extraordinary degree. He conducts not an inquest but a quest, in the medieval sense of the term, and he derives less from detective fiction than from the popular melodrama, whose characteristic excesses are manifest not only in his omnipotence but in his destiny. The destiny of the hero of melodrama. *Servitude*: in *The Spider's Gang* and *The Phantom Executioners* he becomes hopelessly enamoured of Georgette Cuvelier, daughter of his late enemy Flax. *Triumph*: he restores the Bank of England's credit after it has been undermined by Dr. Drum. On occasion the Prime Minister even interrupts a cruise to seek his aid. *Violent behaviour*: in *The Devil's Bed* he uses bombs to destroy the disciples of Baal. *Heady lyricism*: 'There is no place on earth for such beings. Let them return into the night from whence they should never have come.'

His adversaries also behave in a manner worthy of Fantômas. They pursue the detective with a crane: spirit away the bus in which he is travelling; fasten a time bomb



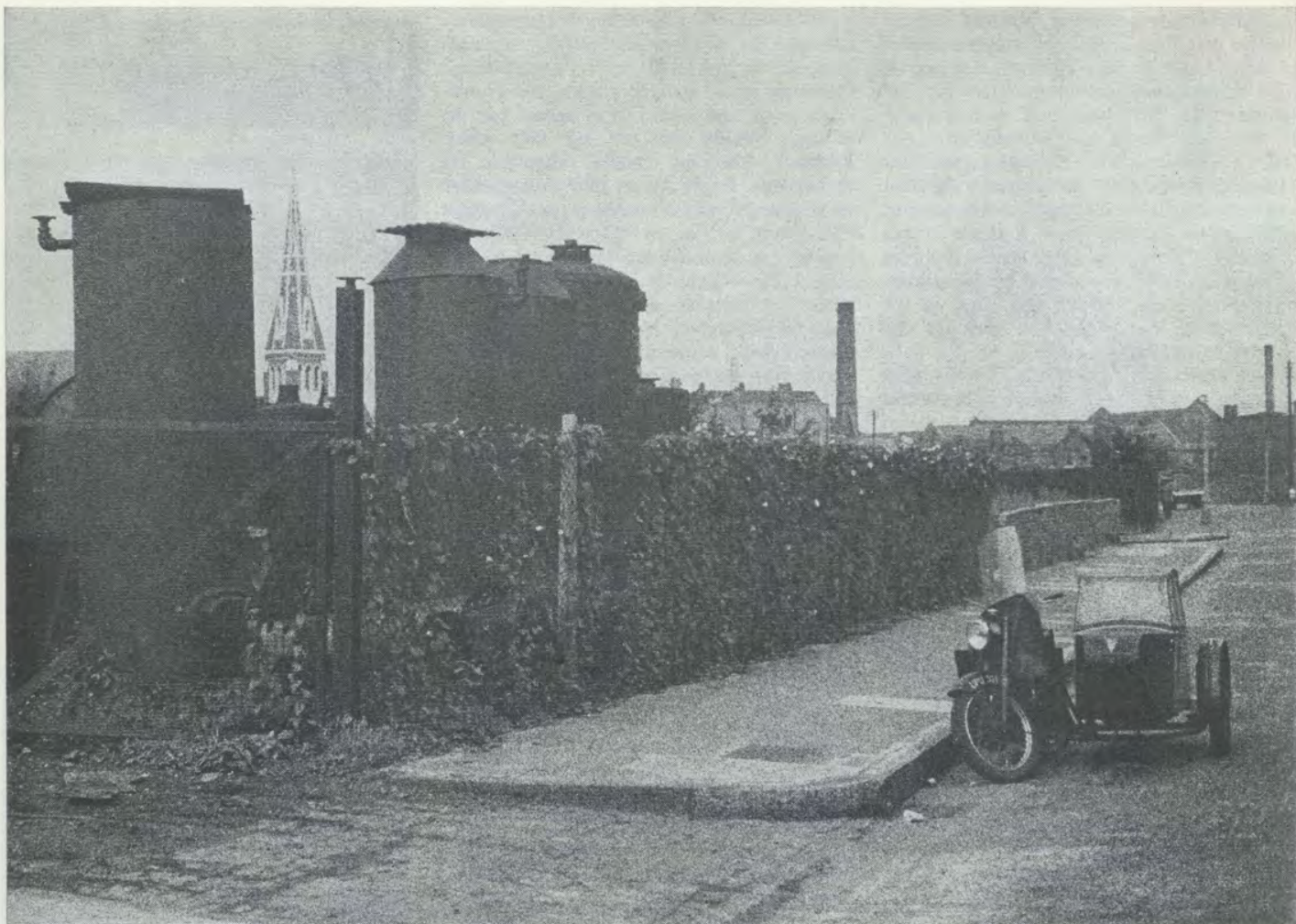
'The True Secret of the Palmer Hotel': '... suddenly, the floor of the lift gave way under Harry Dickson'



'The Purple Demon': '... a man came out of the shadows, brandishing a dagger'



'The Mystery of Bantam House': '... the false nurse was terrified to see a monstrous figure ...'



South East London. Photograph by Alain Resnais

to the wrists of a surgeon whom they have sentenced to amputation; deliver their fateful messages by means of tiny inlaid silver spiders. From time to time, however, this effulgent epic suffered a curious eclipse. Reading certain episodes, Resnais felt inexplicably disappointed. For instance No. 74, *The Maître d'Hôtel's Flair*, seemed to him a banal tale flatly told. Forcing himself to re-read it at leisure and still finding it uninteresting, he came to a disturbing conclusion: the series could not be the work of one writer. For a time he even wondered whether the stories he liked might not each be by a different author. If they were by one man, how could he single out his favourite from among all the anonymous scribes? Finally he thought he had found a clue.

Some of the covers had little connection—sometimes none at all—with the scenes they were supposed to be illustrating. This disparity between covers and content was often evident in stories by his favourite author, the only one to delve into the world of dragons, vampires, occult powers and the fourth dimension. Furthermore, these covers seemed to him vulgar and vastly inferior to the texts they accompanied. He tore them off and destroyed them—setting himself a Herculean task when trying to complete a mint collection twenty years later.

Despite the emergence of formidable rivals after 1936 in Mandrake the Magician, Flash Gordon, Dick Tracy and other American comic strip heroes—whose adventures, Resnais insists, taught him the principles of film-making long before he

handled a camera—Harry Dickson never lost his pride of place in Resnais' affection. In Nice in 1941, Resnais happened to mention him to a young theatre enthusiast he had just met, Frédéric de Towarnicki. Wonder of wonders, this new friend had equally fond memories of Dickson and his adventures. They determined to see that he was elevated to his rightful position among the classics of the genre.

When he took his first steps in the cinema in 1945, Resnais had no thought of translating his favourite character to the screen. Harry Dickson belonged to his private self, a part of his personality he had no wish to display in public. His choice of a popular novel to adapt fell instead on *Fantômas*, which he had in fact already attempted to film—in 8 mm—in 1936. Resnais admired Souvestre and Allain's great arch-criminal as deeply as he did Harry Dickson, but the affection was lacking, enabling him to exteriorise his enthusiasm. With its vast social fresco, however, *Fantômas* had to be a big budget production; and until 1958 Resnais was able to obtain backing only for short films.

In 1949 he visited England for the first time. A bundle of Dickson stories in his pocket, he was making a pilgrimage to the places and addresses mentioned in the adventures, with Harry Dickson as his guide. Four hours after arriving, the pilgrim began his strange safari, the next day taking with him a camera to record the streets and settings (often literally on the point of demolition) which proved to be

For twenty years Mr. Peavy had lived in Hammersmith—at 288a Hammersmith Road, to be precise. This was the address he had given us when he started work, and he had never changed it. But at 288a of this thoroughfare there is no Mr. Peavy; and, what is more, there is no number 288a in Hammersmith Road.—THE GARDEN OF THE FURIES

Lloyd's Enclosure is a dismal alley off the twisting length of Lloyd's Street, which opens into the Brompton Road. It is a dead-end filled with the carriage entrances to the mews of adjacent streets. There is no direct access to Walton Street from Lloyd's Street; it is blocked off at one end by a high garden wall. There was only one house in Lloyd's Enclosure, that of Joe Haskins, a solitary drunkard of dubious habits.—MASTER EEL

92b Bow Street—the lair of he who knows the secret of the Blue Waltz and of the Stars of Death.—THE STARS OF DEATH

'Hallo, Harry Dickson speaking.' 'It's Tom, sir . . . urgent message. At the end of Castle Street by Hutchinson's bar. All these wretched houses here lead into each other. The whole place is riddled with holes like a Gruyère cheese—and they all have rats in them.'—PHANTOM HANGMEN



*Harry Dickson's
London
photographed by
Alvin Ransom -*



exactly where they should be, though sometimes presenting intriguing differences between fiction and reality.

In 1952, the possibility of a Harry Dickson adaptation began to take shape. Resnais was editing a short film by Paul Paviot, *Devoir de Vacances*. The commentary was written by Boris Vian, then best known for his pastiche of the hard-boiled style in his novel *J'irai cracher sur vos Tombes*, but also the author of the poetic fantasy *L'Ecume des Jours*. Resnais and Vian took to each other immediately, and when Resnais talked to him about Harry Dickson, Vian—also an admirer of the comic strips—enthusiastically agreed to write a script. Pierre Braunberger, producer in 1933 of the first sound version of *Fantômas*, was equally enthusiastic about the project and instituted a search for the anonymous author. The Hachette agencies, who distributed the series in France, told him that their records had been destroyed and they couldn't help. Hip Janssen, the Belgian distributor or publisher, had vanished with his files. Resnais went to his former address in Ghent, but the neighbours couldn't tell him anything. If only he had known, he was then but a few yards away from the author's home. He wanted to go on to Amsterdam in the hope of finding some trace of the printers, but money ran out and he had to return to Paris.

Despite the impasse, Braunberger considered going ahead with the production, but was dissuaded by his lawyers: after the film was made, absolutely anybody could come forward, claim to be the author, and sue for damages. Resnais nevertheless did manage to summon Harry Dickson to the screen, symbolically at least, with a splendid *homage* in *Toute la Mémoire du Monde*. In this short film about the Bibliothèque Nationale he registered, in his own particular way, a protest against the oblivion into which his hero had been allowed to fall. Enumerating the treasures preserved by the world's largest library, he lingers for a moment on a pile of Harry Dicksons nestling on a table amid copies of comic strips like *Mandrake the Magician* and *Dick Tracy, Detective*. These precious copies were on show at the Bibliothèque Nationale just long enough to be filmed. An unfortunate lapse in memory meant that this vast library had never acquired them: Resnais had brought copies from his own collection.

Although Braunberger had cried off, Resnais did not lose hope. He continued making enquiries among Belgian booksellers and collectors—and his persistence was finally rewarded. First came a telephone call from Anatole Dauman, head of Argos Films, who declared himself ready to risk a production without the consent of the unknown author. If a genuine claimant turned up, he would buy the rights. Dauman then commissioned a script from Resnais, who chose Frédéric de Towarnicki as his co-author, Boris Vian having in the meantime died.

Next, a twenty-five year old mystery was cleared up by a letter from the Belgian cameraman Kuffer: a secondhand bookseller had told him he knew who the anonymous writer was. It was a septuagenarian ex-sailor who had retired to his native town of Ghent, and whose tales of the fantastic had just been discovered by the periodical *Fiction*: an astonishing body of work,

hitherto unknown except to a few Belgian scholars.

A large part of the work of Jean-Raymond de Kremer (1887–1964) was written in Flemish for juvenile readers under the pseudonym of John Flanders. In French, as Jean Ray, he had published eight books, all issued in small editions by minor Belgian publishers and all dealing with the fantastic. In 1943, two short novels: *Malpertuis* and *The City of Ineffable Fear*. And six collections of short stories: *The Whisky Tales* (1925), *The Ghost Cruise* (1932), *The Great Nocturne* (1942), *The Circles of Terror* (1943), *The Last Canterbury Tales* (1944) and *The Book of Phantoms* (1947). To these, after his discovery by Resnais, were added an anthology of his earlier, out of print writing, *The Twenty-Five Best Foul and Fantastic Tales* (1961), and a short novel, *Saint-Judas de la Nuit* (1963). His death in 1964 was followed by two further anthologies, *The Carousel of Evil* and *Black Golfing Tales*.

The meeting between the elusive author and the admirer who had been on his track for twenty-five years took place in Brussels in 1959 in an atmosphere of great mutual sympathy. How could it have been otherwise with a film-maker whose sailor ancestor had been visited by a ghost, and a sailor-turned-novelist who believed he had travelled in the fourth dimension? This strange voyage is described indirectly in Jean Ray's work, having inspired at least two stories, *The Sinister Street* and *The Pickled Cabbage*. When I first met him on November 23, 1961, this is how he told the tale:

'It was a rainy evening. I had left the university with a friend whose name I have forgotten. We passed the cathedral, and at the corner of a narrow street we parted. I went down another narrow little street full of ecclesiastical out-fitters, and suddenly I saw a pastry-shop with a diamond-paned window I had never noticed before. I eyed some cakes I fancied. I went in: nobody there. I called: nobody came.

I was young enough not to be bothered by such trifles. I took a paper bag, filled it with fancy cakes, and left, resolving to return the next day to pay. As I left the street, a veritable downpour began. A neighbour let me shelter under her umbrella. I got home, where we had guests. The cakes were eaten and pronounced good. I was even told to buy some more next time I passed by.

A fortnight later I did go back. No pastry-shop! I enquired at the shops nearby . . . the butcher, greengrocer . . . and they all told me there had never been a pastry-shop in the street. And yet I had taken home a bag of delicious cakes from it!

Much later I mentioned the matter to a Dominican. He didn't laugh. He simply said, "You had the good fortune—or perhaps the ill fortune—to escape. Re-read your Shakespeare and remember what Hamlet says: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio . . .'"

Did I really enter the fourth dimension? It's my only great adventure.'

Jean Ray forgot to tell Resnais this story when they first met, but he did have revelations to offer about the mystery of the covers and the origins of 'the American Sherlock Holmes'. At first a trifle embarrassed—the respectable citizen reminded of a youthful peccadillo—Jean Ray did not deny that the need to eat might have driven him to perpetrate some issues of *Harry Dickson*, *the American Sherlock Holmes*. But he did

not think it fair that he should shoulder the entire responsibility since, as Resnais had guessed, there were others . . .

Finally convinced, however, that his past was nothing to be ashamed of, he admitted after checking off a list of titles that he was responsible for about one hundred and five of the one hundred and seventy-eight issues. He also wrote the one hundred and seventy-ninth, *The Steel Puppet*, which was announced but never appeared. But, he added, he did not invent the character, and had never found out where, when or by whom Harry Dickson was created.

Around 1930, Captain de Kremer had left the merchant navy (and occasional smuggling) and was at a loose end. A publisher (perhaps Hip Janssen?) told him that he had just bought a complete series of detective stories from a German publisher with the idea of doing a French edition, and asked him to act as one of the translators. De Kremer agreed, but soon found it a thankless task: dull and disjointed plots, insipidly told, with solutions coming pat to the dreary detective. The translator began to tinker with the original text, patching up the lamer moments of the plot, brightening up descriptive passages, and so on. Finally wearying of it, he announced that he was quitting.

The publisher dissuaded him, giving him permission to translate as freely as he liked and even to invent. On one condition: the expense of new covers was out of the question, so the old illustrations must connect with at least one scene in the revised text. In the event, Ray came to the conclusion that the simplest thing was to jettison the German text and use his own imagination, starting from an (increasingly cursory) examination of the cover. Hence the disparity between text and illustrations. In the spring of 1940, the stock of covers having run out, the publisher told Jean Ray that he was going to cease publication after No. 176, *The Street of the Missing Head*. But over the past seven years Jean Ray had grown fond of his adopted hero, and he had several further exploits in mind. He persuaded the publisher to extend the series for a while, and had a friend draw new covers for Nos. 177 and 178, *The Riddle of the Sphinx* and *Factories of Death*, and probably for the unpublished *Steel Puppet*.

Jean Ray told Resnais that he worked at home, writing each issue in a single night while drinking gin—a stimulant doubtless responsible for the astonishing fertility of his imagination. Sixty or seventy pages were dashed off on an ancient typewriter and sent unread to Dutch printers who knew no French and added their own typographical errors to the typing mistakes—with sometimes bizarre results. Ray never bothered to number his pages, and they sometimes added to the mysteries of the plot by getting out of order. 'There,' Resnais says, 'he was boasting . . . he also maintained that his machine used to type away on its own. Towards the end of the series, his complicity with the character was so great that Dickson used to materialise before him. They even used to hold conversations: "What would you do in my place?"'*

When I first met him in 1961, Jean Ray

*Told to me by Alain Resnais.

confirmed all these revelations—except for Dickson's materialisations—and added a further detail: one of his fellow translators in the early days was a journeyman baker. By 1934 the other translators had disappeared, and from No. 62 (*The Chinatown White Slavers*) Ray was responsible for all but eleven issues. The cover illustrations for these eleven are in a different style from the rest, while the texts contain some strange anomalies. On some pages the detective's name is no longer Dickson but . . . Sherlock Holmes; Tom Wills now and again becomes Watson. The cover for No. 76 (*The Purple Demon*) shows the detective and his assistant lying in bed in hospital; on boards above their heads their names are clearly legible—Holmes and Watson.

These episodes, probably used on occasions when Jean Ray couldn't deliver on time, come from another anonymous series translated from the German (by Fernand Laven) and published in Paris nearly thirty years earlier. Thirty issues were published from October 7, 1907, under the general title of *The Secret Files of Sherlock Holmes*.* The first issue, subtitled *The Secret of the Young Widow*, was resurrected under the same title as No. 70 of the Harry Dickson series in 1934.

The Harry Dickson series thus seems to derive from two sources—three if one takes the covers into account. From the fashions shown, three periods can be distinguished: 1890, 1905 (the Fernand Laven series) and 1914. It must have taken a certain faith to launch a series in 1930 with such outmoded covers, which became positively antiquated as the series progressed. Jean Ray conscientiously thought up ingenious ways of accounting for the anachronisms in the illustrations. In *The Phantom of the Red Ruins* he stressed the extreme isolation of the lords of Red Manor so as to be able to write: 'They are dressed in the manner of the last century.' In other episodes, the old-fashioned costumes are justified by the eccentricity, miserliness or madness of the characters. To pacify the crazed subscriber to *Stall 27*, the singer Eva Merrill agrees to wear the fashions of an earlier age, like those she wore on a poster exhibited on a Morris pillar (in the illustration, Eva is seen gazing intently at a Morris pillar from the window).

In making these scrupulous efforts to avoid anachronisms, Jean Ray sometimes fell into new ones of his own, unless the unnumbered pages or the automatic typewriter are to blame. A confusion in time, manifest through the confusion of styles and fashions: seemingly a contradiction difficult to resolve on the screen. But for Resnais it was a fantastic blessing, placing the hero outside time. Intending to recreate Jean Ray's inner world, he had decided to surround the detective with characters from the three different periods, 1890, 1905 and 1914. He was also determined to respect the anachronism of the settings, for which Jean Ray was solely responsible. Imaginary little English towns (*Stall 27*, *The Street of the Missing Head*), certain districts in London (*The City of Ineffable Fear*), shops (innumerable haberdasheries), old ladies' drawing-rooms

. . . to describe them, Jean Ray cheated a little by dredging up memories from his own childhood in Flanders. In *Stall 27* and *The Resurrection of the Gorgon*, a Morris pillar papered over with theatrical advertisements is prominently featured—an object familiar to Paris but not to London. *Stall 27* (written in 1939) features a bizarre world of gas-lighting where the hero yet thinks nothing of using the telephone or an aeroplane.

Sometimes a glint of surrealist humour slips in between the cover illustrations and Ray's interpretation of them. The illustration for *The Mystery of Bantam House* shows the horrified encounter in a very bourgeois salon between a slavey and a skeleton. The terror and the dress are supposed to conceal the sang froid of Tom Wills disguised as a nurse. The cover of *The Haunted Pictures* depicts a Roman chariot race: what else but a picture on the wall of a room visited by the hero? Best of all, perhaps, the illustration of Harry Dickson wearing traditional Turkish costume, kneeling on a platform and offering his neck to the yataghan of an executioner—very much local colour, the latter—against a splendid background of mosques. All very well, but the plot happens to be set quite straightforwardly in London. So, just for a moment, the action is whisked into a cellar where a bizarre criminal dresses up his victims and executes them in front of a view of Istanbul projected by magic lantern.

Whom had Resnais in mind for the role of the detective? 'Any actor capable of playing Sherlock Holmes could do it,' he says. Ideally, he would have chosen Basil Rathbone, who played Holmes so magnificently in the cinema and on television. But in 1960 Rathbone, then still alive, was too old for the part (age about 47–52). For years, though without approaching him, Resnais had Jean Vilar in mind, since his aquiline profile matched the portrait inset with each issue. But then came the day when Vilar was too old. Next came Laurence Olivier, who was reluctant to abandon the theatre for a shooting schedule of 18–22 weeks. After considering Giorgio Albertazzi and

Peter O'Toole, Resnais finally settled on Dirk Bogarde, having in the meantime rejected the possibility of Kirk Douglas, Tony Curtis or David Niven, all stars who would have ensured international distribution but who were physically wrong for the role.

The cinema is an industry. Production costs outweighed distribution prospects, so the script for *The Adventures of Harry Dickson* had to be shortened (rather than reshaped) three times between 1960 and 1967. In its original form, a monster sketch, it would have ended up as a four-hour film. Pierre Kast helped Resnais to do a second version, shortened by half an hour. A third, similar in structure to the second, ran to two hours and forty minutes. Finally, working on his own, Resnais got it down to two hours in December 1967, but wasn't happy with the result: 'A series of fascinating fragments, but only fragments, and I couldn't find an ending.' His preference goes to the second version.

Today, Resnais has no idea whether he will ever be able to realise this project which he has unconsciously carried within him since 1934, for which he scouted the settings in 1949, and which he first proposed to a producer in 1951. But at least it won't all have been for nothing. The widespread interest aroused by this phantom film resulted in the publication in 1966 of a first volume of Harry Dickson's adventures. Published by the Belgian firm of Gérard in the Marabout series, it reprinted five issues. Between then and April 1972, twelve other volumes have followed, containing in all sixty of the one hundred and five adventures written by Jean Ray.

Almost like a manuscript in a bottle thrown into the sea of time, these stories about an American detective in London were washed up on the Breton coast to be found in 1934 by a twelve-year-old boy. Otherwise nobody now would have heard of Harry Dickson, and nobody would be able to read a word of the detective's marvellous adventures.

Translation by Tom Milne

Jean Ray. Photograph by André Goeffers



*Because the title was a plagiarism, it had to be changed from the second issue to *The Secret Files of the King of Detectives*.



'We Can't Go Home Again':
Nicholas Ray in Santa Claus costume

Circle of Pain: The Cinema of Nicholas Ray

Jonathan Rosenbaum

Surfacing in Cannes in the worst of conditions—not quite finished, unsubtitled, shrieking with technical problems of all kinds, and dropped into the lap of an exhausted press fighting to stay awake through the fifteenth and final afternoon of the festival—Nicholas Ray's *We Can't Go Home Again* may have actually hurried a few critics back to their homes; but it probably shook a few heads loose in the process. Clearly it wasn't the sort of experience anyone was likely to come to terms with, much less assimilate, in such an unfavourable setting, although the demands it makes on an audience would be pretty strenuous under any circumstances.

Created in collaboration with Ray's film class at the State University of New York at Binghamton, and featuring Ray and his students, the film attempts to do at least five separate things at once: (1) describe the conditions and ramifications of the film-making itself, from observations at the editing table to all sorts of peripheral factors (e.g., a female student becoming a part-time prostitute in order to raise money for the film); (2) explore the political alienation experienced by many young Americans in the late 60s and early 70s; (3) demystify Ray's image as a Hollywood director, in relation to both his film class and his audience; (4) implicate the private lives and personalities of Ray and his students in all of the preceding; and (5) integrate these concerns in a radical form that permits an audience to view them in several aspects at

once. Thus, for the better part of two hours, six separate images are projected on the screen together, juxtaposing super-8 and 16 mm footage against a 35 mm backdrop (with the aid of a videotape synthesiser) in one crowded fresco.

Quite simply, it is a Faustian attempt to do the impossible: as Ray indicated at his press conference, an effort to make 'what in our minds is a *Guernica*' out of such tools as a 'broken-down Bolex', 'a Mitchell that cost \$25 out of Navy surplus', and a lot of impatient maverick energy. The hysteria underlining most of the film is reflected in the title Ray originally gave to the project, *The Gun Under My Pillow*; the level of aspiration can be seen in the fact that it is announced as the first part of a trilogy.

At its 'best'—an excruciating sequence in close-up where a student savagely hacks off

his beard—it arrives at some very potent psychodrama. At its 'worst', it becomes an uneven struggle towards coherence landing in chaos, like some orgy of collective action-painting that leaves a classroom in a state of carnage. The theme of auto-destruction in one form or another is fairly constant. Ray himself is seen undergoing at least two symbolic deaths: one as Santa Claus, knocked into the air by a hit-and-run driver (his costume lyrically cascading to the pavement in gracefully cut slow-motion); another in his own person, near the film's end, when after preparing his suicide and then changing his mind (like *Pierrot le fou*), he accidentally hangs himself while attempting to remove the rope. His parting message to his students: 'Take care of each other—all the rest is vanity—and let the rest of us swing'—a form of self-abasement that Ray believes appropriate to his generation, described at his press conference as 'more guilty of betrayal than any other generation in history.'

We Can't Go Home Again is certainly cinema at the end of its tether; like the fatal test of courage in *Rebel Without a Cause*, a 'blind run' up to and maybe even over the edge of a cliff. But the autobiographical involvement is not exactly new to Ray's work: there's a troubled novelist named

Nick in *Born to be Bad* and a sympathetic policeman named Ray in *Rebel*; Ray acted the part of the American ambassador in *55 Days at Peking*, and a gallery of partial stand-ins can be found in many of his other works. Self-accusal in the first-person plural is nothing new either: the original title that Ray wanted for *They Live By Night*—the name of the Edward Anderson novel it was based on—was *Thieves Like Us*.

Before the credits of *They Live By Night* appear, we see the two major characters, Bowie (Farley Granger) and Keechie (Cathy O'Donnell) kissing, while a subtitle introduces them in consecutive phrases, parsed out like the lines of a folk ballad: 'This boy . . . 'and this girl . . . 'were never properly introduced to the world we live in . . . ' Then behind the credits is shown a speeding car containing four men, filmed from the changing perspectives of a helicopter following its progress. As the credits end, we return to ground level in time to see and hear a tire blow out; the car swerves over and jerks to a stop. The driver, who has been carrying three escaped convicts (Chicamaw: Howard da Silva; T-Dub: J. C. Flippen; and Bowie), is forced out of the car and—outside the camera's range—beaten: the sound of the first fist-blow coincides with a cut to Bowie's response as he watches the violence. Then we return to the helicopter's viewpoint, which gradually descends as the convicts flee across an open field, approaching and passing a giant billboard.

The extraordinary beginning of Ray's first movie prefigures not only the remainder of the film, but most of the major impulses

Guilty generations. Bogart and John Derek in 'Knock on Any Door'; John Derek and James Cagney in 'Run for Cover'



in his subsequent work. A romantic vision of the Couple is immediately juxtaposed with anarchic movement erupting into violence; desperate action is treated as a spectacular form of choreography. Each element is intensely articulated, yet 'distanced' into a sort of abstraction: the spatial-emotional continuity of the first shot set in relief by the underlining verbal montage that 'explains' it, the speeding car turned into creeping insect by the deterministic overhead angles which circumscribe its apparent freedom, and the violence displaced by the cut to Bowie, bringing us full circle back to the romantic hero already condemned in the opening shot—a circle of pain defining the limits of Ray's universe. And the exhilarating plasticity of the flight across the field, pivoted around the imposing billboard, fastens all three characters to the pop iconography of a society that surrounds and ultimately crushes them, the social recognition that moulds their identities and makes them 'real' at the same time that it signs their death warrants. (When Chicamaw later reads about their escape in the newspaper, he remarks to Bowie, 'You're in luck, kid. You're travellin' with real people . . .')

The second sequence begins with Bowie looking through the holes in a garden lattice like a caged animal while Keechie drives up in a car. A series of guarded exchanges initiates the defensive dialogues that invariably take place between Ray's couples before they strike a balance—a compromise between duel and duet that recurs with variations in the celebrated kitchen scenes of *In a Lonely Place* (Humphrey Bogart straightening out a grapefruit knife while he talks to Gloria Grahame) and *Johnny Guitar* (Sterling Hayden asking Joan Crawford to tell him lies, which she does in cadenced, ballad-like refrains), and comparable first encounters in *On Dangerous Ground*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, *Hot Blood*, *Bitter Victory* and *Party Girl*. As their mutual suspicions begin to cool, and Bowie gets into the car, the sound of a passing train is faintly heard, a prefiguration of the much louder one that we hear just before Bowie is shot in the final scene. And after Bowie sits down next to Keechie, there is a cut to a shot framing them from the back of the car, where we see them through another mesh pattern, caged together at the very instant that they visually 'compose' a couple.

To etch out a framework of romantic futility and then to dive into it without restraint is very characteristic of Ray. If we add to this tendency a strong empathy for adolescents, a particular flair for colour and CinemaScope, a visibly recurrent (but perpetually unfulfilled) desire to film a musical, a social conscience seeking to bear witness to the major problems of its time, and a taste for anarchic violence that alternately obscures, complicates and helps to illuminate these issues—culminating in grandiose fables, parables and pedagogical 'lessons' followed by a total break with commercial film-making, and the gradual creation of a new aesthetic based on an increased degree of political engagement and a new emphasis on collective authorship—we have arrived at a description of not only Ray's career, but a considerable portion of Godard's.

Obviously one shouldn't push these

parallels too far: the 'lessons' of *Weekend* and *Le Gai Savoir* are not the same as those in *The Savage Innocents* (although all three films perform radical assaults upon many concepts central to Western culture); and if the alienating aspects of *We Can't Go Home Again* recall some of those in *Vent d'Est* and *Vladimir et Rosa*, this is not to say that they are structurally or ideologically equivalent. But when we consider that Ray attracted more sustained enthusiasm among Godard and his colleagues at *Cahiers du Cinéma* than any other American director in the 50s, and was subsequently mentioned more often than any other director in Godard's films, it becomes clear that many of these relationships are far from coincidental.

One suspects that what Ray represented for many of the younger *Cahiers* critics was the triumph of a very personal, autobiographical cinema forged into the studio styles of RKO, Republic, Paramount, Warners, Columbia, Fox and MGM; a restless exploratory nature that tended to regard each project as an existential adventure and a foray of research into the background of a given topic (police brutality, rodeo people, juvenile delinquency, gypsies, Chicago gangsters, Eskimos); a loner mentality epitomised in a line from *Johnny Guitar* ('I'm a stranger here myself'); a florid romantic imagination, dramatic intensity and visual bravado that could make *The Lusty Men* evidence of an obsession for abstraction equal to Bresson's (*Rivette*), *Johnny Guitar* the Beauty and the Beast of Westerns (Truffaut), *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Bigger Than Life* modern evocations of Greek tragedy (Rohmer), and *Bitter Victory* 'the most Goethian of films' (Godard).

Unlike Godard, Ray cannot be considered a major stylistic innovator, at least not yet:

'... Never properly introduced to the world we live in...' Cathy O'Donnell in 'They Live By Night'; Sal Mineo in 'Rebel Without a Cause'



it is much too soon to determine whether the use of multiple images in *We Can't Go Home Again* will bear any fruit. (Tati's *Playtime*, which utilises multiple focal points within single images, was released six years ago, and its innovations have not yet made any visible impact on other directors.) But it is equally evident that in his choice of subjects as well as his treatments of them, Ray has frequently been ten years or more ahead of his time: consider his handling of youth culture in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), drugs in *Bigger Than Life* (1956), ecology in *Wind Across the Everglades* (1958) and anthropology in *The Savage Innocents* (1959-60). From this point of view, *King of Kings* (1961) is Ray's *Jesus Christ Superstar*, not only for its somewhat pop (and pop art) treatment of the Gospels *avant la lettre*, but more specifically because the flaming red garments and rebellious stances of its Jesus (Jeffrey Hunter) take us right back to James Dean in his zipper jacket. (As though to remind us of this icon—currently on display in Henri Langlois' Cinema Museum—Ray is seen wearing a near-replica in *We Can't Go Home Again*.)

Paradoxically, it is the pop imagery of *Rebel Without a Cause* that makes the film now appear somewhat dated in relation to *East of Eden* (1954), a quasi-anachronistic work less bound to the zeitgeist of any particular period. But it has dated interestingly. If the manners and moods of mid-1950s teenagers are captured with a comic-book flourish and heightened lyricism that

Buzz's death could just as easily have been Jim's, just as Plato's subsequent madness and death could also have been Jim's—indeed, the appearance and stances of Dean and Mineo recall separate aspects of Farley Granger in *They Live By Night*. In another sense, Jim's anger and imperiousness matches his mother's: the two are linked in an extraordinary subjective shot (later echoed in *Hot Blood* and *Wind Across the Everglades*) involving a 360° camera tilt when he sees her upsidedown, then right-side-up, descending a stairway; and he later assumes his father's role when he forms a nuclear family with Judy and Plato in a deserted mansion.

This semi-mystical sense of equality between individuals is central to Ray's work. The discovery of a moral equivalence between the supposedly antithetical natures of the antagonist heroes in *Bitter Victory* and *Wind Across the Everglades* provides the dramatic climax of both films; in *King of Kings*, the treatment of the Sermon on the Mount as a series of personal exchanges reflects the same preoccupation. Between Ray's couples, we usually find a set of precise antitheses and balances. In *Party Girl*, the hero (Robert Taylor) is lame and the heroine (Cyd Charisse) is a dancer; each is a 'prostitute'—he as a gangster's lawyer, she as a party girl—who reforms with the help of the other. In *On Dangerous Ground*, Ida Lupino's literal blindness balances—and helps to overcome—Robert Ryan's emotional blindness, and his uncontrolled sadism is similarly altered by the psychosis of Lupino's brother. It is worth remarking, however, that with the possible exceptions of Gloria Grahame in *In a Lonely Place* and Chana Eden in *Wind Across the Everglades*—both highly original and unjustly neglected performances—Ray's heroines seldom seem to have much identity apart from their relationships to men; in *Bigger Than Life*, the difficulty of Lou Avery (Barbara Rush) in acting contrary to her husband's crazed demands is one of the tragic levers in the plot.

Aside from its system of character equations, *Rebel* abounds in other abstract elements: the cramming of all the action into one improbable 24-hour period; the link between the global annihilation in 'a burst of gas and fire' enacted in the planetarium, where the astronomer announces that 'the earth will not be missed,' and the explosion of Buzz's car at the end of the 'Chickie-run' (and the implicit fact that Buzz is subsequently not missed very much either); the arrival of Plato at Dawson High, with a sharp cut from the loud backfire of his motor scooter (horizontal) to the raising of the American flag (vertical); the curious recapitulation of references to animals (the toy monkey in the first shot and Jim's joke when handing Judy her compact: 'You wanna see a monkey?'; the epithet 'chicken' and Jim's reply in the deserted house to Plato's 'Who's there?'—'Nobody, just us chickens!'; Jim mooing at a reference to Taurus in the planetarium, then being taunted in the knife fight with Buzz like a torero's bull); the 'musical' stylisation of the slow build-up to the knife fight outside the planetarium, with the actors posed and choreographed around Jim's car in a way that suggests a superior version of *West Side Story*.



'The unfulfilled desire to film a musical ...': Jane Russell, Cornel Wilde in 'Hot Blood'

Ray's occasional tendency to gravitate towards the style of musicals—a function of his colours, his somewhat theatrical manner of lighting sets, a penchant for viewing physical movement as spectacle, and a use of folk ballads (real or implied) along with other musical interludes—can be seen more distinctly in *Party Girl*, or in the opening scene at Vienna's saloon in *Johnny Guitar*, when Johnny introduces himself with a strum on his guitar and the Dancing Kid reciprocates by grabbing Emma and dancing her across the floor. But Ray's furthest step in this direction remains *Hot Blood*, an unevenly realised film that springs to vibrant life in all its 'musical' sequences: Cornel Wilde's defiant dance when he is refused employment as a dancing teacher (sarcastically flaunting the gypsy stereotype that has been assigned to him), his 'whip dance' with Jane Russell, and the gypsies' triumphant song that celebrates their marriage and later reconciliation.

Considering the stylistic traits touched upon so far—from romanticism to anarchic violence, pop imagery to 'cosmic' abstraction, symmetry to choreography—we have clearly arrived at a complex of themes, procedures and attitudes that could legitimately be called larger than life, an impulse that manifests itself in details as fleeting as the word 'God' scrawled on the bark of a tree in *Johnny Guitar*, or as central as Richard Burton's dismissal of 19th century Berber ruins in *Bitter Victory* as 'too modern for me'. It is a vision suggesting and requiring a large canvas—something closer to the all-encompassing breadth of the planetarium in *Rebel Without a Cause* than the confines of a television screen smaller than life, where most of Ray's films are condemned to seek recognition today.*

Limitless aspiration combined with profound alienation is the condition suffered by the hero of *Bigger Than Life*, Ray's most powerful film; and if his rendering of this anguish occupies a special place in his work, this is largely because it succeeds in attack-



'Rebel Without a Cause': '... the mythology of that time and culture'

seems slightly surreal now, this enables us to see only that much more of the mythology of that time and culture. Yet for all the concreteness of its observations, it is probably, after *Bitter Victory*, the most schematic and abstract of Ray's films. Jim (James Dean), Judy (Natalie Wood), Plato (Sal Mineo) and Buzz (Corey Allen) are carefully differentiated in their backgrounds in order to suggest a sociological cross-section, but at the same time they represent variations of the same dilemmas, and can even be called different facets of a single personality.

The first shot introduces us to Jim; the second and third link him to Judy and Plato in the police station, each counterpart unobtrusively providing a compositional 'balance' within the CinemaScope frame. Later, in a moving scene on the edge of a precipice, Jim and Buzz suddenly become equals and friends before competing in a 'Chickie-run' where the latter plunges to his death; Jim promptly assumes Buzz's role as Judy's boy friend, and we realise that

*Even more unfortunate is the perishability of 20th Century-Fox's Deluxe Color, which guarantees the virtual extinction of *Bigger Than Life* and *The James Brothers* as integral works. It is no small irony that Republic's low-budget Trucolor in *Johnny Guitar* survives intact today, while Fox's colour films of the same period are gradually deteriorating into a ghastly corpse-like pink as the other colours irrevocably drain away.

ing the roots of this condition rather than remaining on the level of its various symptoms. In *a Lonely Place*, containing many elements of an auto-critique, is an earlier foray into a similar form of investigation: set in an extremely deglamorised Hollywood, it deals with the uncontrolled violence of a scriptwriter (Humphrey Bogart) and its tragic consequences, his gradual alienation from everyone he feels closest to. *Bigger Than Life*, which concerns the effects of cortisone on a schoolteacher (James Mason) who has contracted a painful, incurable inflammation of the arteries—an objective correlative, perhaps, for Ray's own vision?—is obviously less 'personal' in any autobiographical sense, but its implications are more universal. Its real subject is not the drug itself but what it reveals about Ed Avery; and beyond that, what Ed Avery reveals about the society he inhabits and—to

a greater and lesser extent—emulates.

Bigger Than Life is a profoundly upsetting exposure of middle-class aspirations because it virtually defines madness—Avery's drug-induced psychosis—as taking these values seriously. Each emblem of the American Dream implicitly honoured by Avery in the opening scenes (his ideals about education, his respect for class and social status, his desire for his son 'to improve himself') is systematically turned on its head, converted from dream to nightmare, by becoming only more explicit in his behaviour. The dramatic function of his incurable disease and his taking of cortisone, carrying the respective promises of death and superlife, is to act on the slick magazine ads that he and his family try to inhabit in much the same way that the doctor's X-ray of his torso illuminates his terminal condition: an appearance of normality is sub-

verted before our eyes, bit by bit, until it achieves the Gothic dimensions of a horror story that has always existed beneath the surface of his life.

Returning to school after his release from the hospital, Ed tells his wife Lou that he feels 'ten feet tall', and a grotesque low-angle shot of him as he turns towards the school building echoes and parodies this notion; but as he walks away from the camera, his body becomes progressively dwarfed by the building—which, for all its apparent mediocrity, is a lot taller than ten feet. Similarly, a scene where Ed, playing the big shot, forces Lou to purchase gaudy clothes which they can't afford, undermines the Hollywood images that inspire such a gesture to the point where they become loathsome—deranged and obscene. And Ed's monomaniacal concern for his son's 'improvement', a direct consequence of his unadmitted despair, reaches its apex when, after hearing a church sermon, he decides to 'sacrifice' his son to his ideals by killing him with a pair of scissors. When Lou reminds him that God told Abraham to spare Isaac, he can only reply with the *reductio ad absurdum* of his outsized egotism: 'God was wrong.'

A general sense that, insofar as He exists at all, 'God was wrong,' infuses the world of Ray's films, from the nervous instability of his compositions to the unrelieved torment of his heroes. In a rare and unprecedented moment of rebellion against Ed's demands, Lou slams the door of a medicine cabinet and the mirror cracks. Ed sees himself fragmented and duplicated in the broken surface—a crowd of images alienated from one another that gives the lie to his fantasy that he maintains a consistent, logical and continuous identity.

If Ed Avery's madness is implicitly the madness of America and Hollywood, perhaps the radical approach of *We Can't Go Home Again*, coming seventeen years later, is to offer a structural equivalent to Lou's rebellious gesture. Splintering their image into several independent variants of the same thing that refuse to cohere, Ray and his students seem to be implying that the state of America has become similarly fragmented and discontinuous. We can't go home again because 'home' is no longer a single place and 'we' are no longer one:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and
everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the
worst

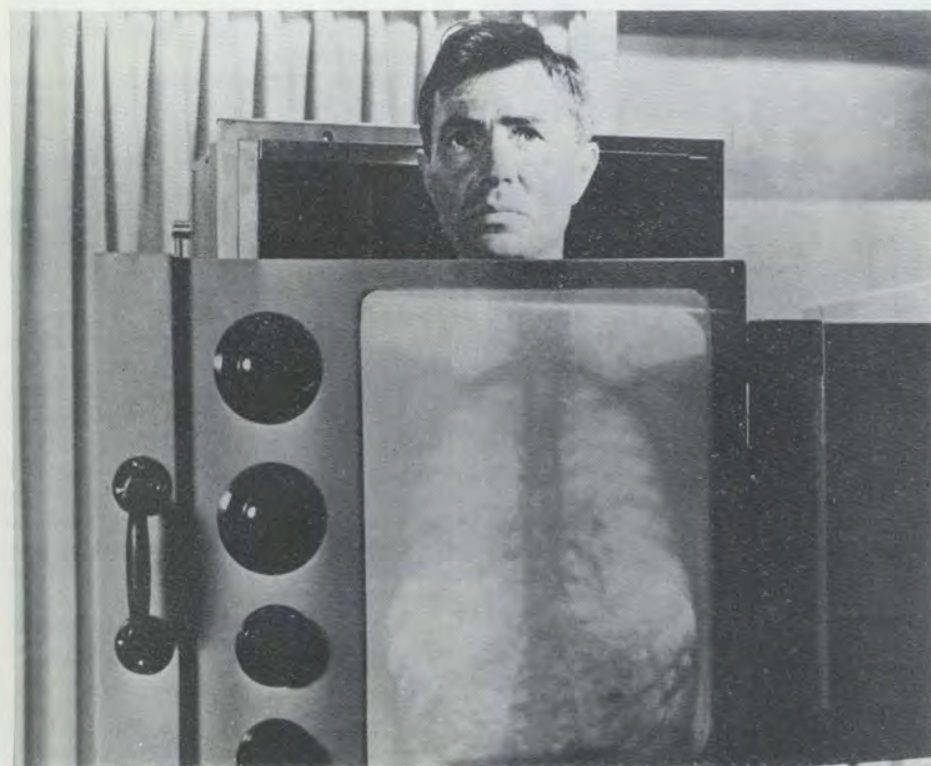
Are full of passionate intensity.

—Yeats, *The Second Coming*

Within such a context of alienation, it is pointless and more than a little premature to talk about success or failure. Over a decade after his departure from commercial film-making, Ray has returned to a public forum to officiate at the conception of a very rough beast . . . A contribution to another film, *Wet Dreams*, made independently of his students, is expected to appear before this article reaches print, and other projects—including one with Sterling Hayden—are still struggling to be born. ■



Circles of Pain. Above: 'Bitter Victory'. Below: James Mason as the suffering schoolteacher in 'Bigger Than Life'



Robert Benton says that since he got to know Arthur Penn well—Benton and his partner David Newman broke into movies with their script for *Bonnie and Clyde*—he realises that every character in an Arthur Penn film is Arthur Penn. Benton is convinced, in fact, that all film-making is autobiographical and becomes for the film-maker a way to 'cope with himself'. If this is so, the advantage of a collaboration like Benton and Newman's is that it necessarily turns the autobiography into something dramatic, a dialogue rather than an interior monologue. The result in their recent Western, *Bad Company*, is characters who are convincingly other-directed and free from self-scrutiny. Out of the partners' need to cope with each other grows what Benton calls the 'Protestantism' of the film. 'As our producer, Stanley Jaffe, once pointed out,' Benton explains, 'this is the first non-Jewish Western in a long time. It is the first Western in which somebody doesn't have a crisis of conscience about killing somebody else. It's the first Western in which people's consciousness is of a fundamentalist sort, and in which the movie's attitude towards those characters is also fundamentalist.'

Bad Company is one of two scripts which Benton and Newman wrote 'almost simultaneously', so that each of them could direct one. Now that Benton has directed this one, Newman's, which is entitled *Money's Tight*, is in production. As they talk about their scripts, each one jumping into the other's sentences to insert his own clauses and qualifiers, it becomes apparent how much they have rehearsed in their own relationship

the relationships between protagonists in their films. Newman is Clyde Barrow (Warren Beatty), while Benton is Buck Barrow (Gene Hackman). In *There Was a Crooked Man*, the prison Western they scripted in 1970 for Joseph Mankiewicz, Newman is Paris Pitman (Kirk Douglas), the King Rat of the prison, and Benton is Lopeman (Henry Fonda), the reforming warden who eventually absconds with loot

he recovers from one of Pitman's robberies.

In *Bad Company* Benton has his counterpart in Drew Dixon (Barry Brown), an upright young man who is on the dodge from the Civil War draft. After being dispatched with his parents' blessing and his dead brother's watch to St. Joe, where he hopes to join a wagon train, Drew falls foul of Jake Rumsey (Jeff Bridges), who this time is the Newman surrogate. At their first meeting Jake knocks Drew out in order to rob him; but they soon meet again, and after they settle their differences Drew joins the band of delinquents that Jake is leading West across the prairie.

That Newman is the inspiration for the more mischievous heroes in the films seems clear when the talk turns for a minute to the two men's days at *Esquire*, where Newman was an editor and Benton an art director. (They take credit for having developed *Esquire's* circulation-boosting 'Annual Dubious Achievement Awards'.) Benton explains matter-of-factly that when he and Newman were teamed up at *Esquire*, they found themselves talking more and more about movies, until they finally began working nights on the script that turned out to be *Bonnie and Clyde*. 'And we were also working on that script,' Newman adds with an incorrigible grin, 'a lot of the time during the day, when *Esquire* thought we were working on something else.' Benton smiles with good-natured tolerance, much the way Drew does whenever Jake starts bragging about his own acts of petty larceny.

After listening to Benton and Newman for a while, it dawns on you that everything in *Bad Company* came from just this sort of groping repartee, this improvisation on each other's personalities and ideas. That this should be the case is at once understandable and surprising. It is understandable because most movies seem to be made the same way. There are few directors who succeed through comprehensive planning and premeditation—Kubrick, for instance. But most seem to rely as much on sheer intuition and dumb luck. The surprising thing is the high degree of structure and coherence and apparent self-awareness that can result from such impromptu methods.

Like most successful films, *Bad Company* looks as if it were made with some articulated master plan in mind. For one thing, the finished film seems to know its place in the history of the Western. The film suggests that Benton was conscious all along of the relation of what he was doing to conventions that have evolved over many years in hundreds of films. What is more, the montage of *Bad Company*—the conception, arrangement and relationship of its episodes—achieves a kind of symmetry that, we can hardly help feeling, must have been intended from the beginning. Besides making literal sense as a story, the film has symbolic and thematic aspects that provide much of the satisfaction we take in watching it. In other words, like any artful film, this one persuades us that it has turned out the way it has on purpose: that each scene and cut must have been made expressly to go where it is in the finished film. Yet to hear Benton tell it, nothing could be further from the truth.



Colin L. Westerbeck, Jr.

GOOD COMPANY

'*Bad Company*' (above); '*Bonnie and Clyde*'



Like Peter Bogdanovich or Francis Ford Coppola, Benton is part of the first genera-

tion of directors young enough to have grown up going to talking pictures. Though the influence of this education on *Bad Company* may often be subconscious, it is none the less real, as Benton would be the first to admit. Acting as his own casting director, he has put such old-timers as David Huddleston and Jim Davis in the film's character roles; and 'these men bring the whole tradition of the Western into this Western,' as Newman observes. Photographically the film also reflects a vision that could only have been acquired in the second row of the balcony on Saturday afternoons.

Whenever Benton and Newman have written a script, they have first spent a few days talking about the visual style which they ultimately hoped to see realised from their words. Before he began directing *Bad Company*, Benton therefore sat down with Gordon Willis, his director of photography, to do the same thing. Benton's policy in working with Willis, as with Paul and Anthea Sylbert, his production and costume designers, was to reach an understanding about what he wanted and then not 'noodle' with their work—not interfere or fret over their efforts. 'This is something I learned at *Esquire*,' he says. 'When you're an editor or an art director, you tend to work through other people and you have to get the best out of them. It's a remote control device. On *Bad Company*, once I reached an understanding with someone, what he contributed to the film seldom seemed to violate it.'

The photographic style Benton and Willis agreed on is one in which there is no unnecessary tracking, panning, slow motion or rack focus, no zoom shots and no lenses over fifty millimetres. 'Just because the equipment is there to move the camera doesn't mean you have to move it,' Benton insists. 'If you're doing something out on the prairie where people can move and move and move and the landscape doesn't change, there's no reason to have a moving camera. You're not moving to anywhere.'

'This attitude comes from a high appreciation of Ford,' Newman adds. 'And of Anthony Mann,' Benton adds to Newman's addition. 'If you think of pictures like *Winchester '73* or *Bend of the River*, they always deal with two guys who have a history together, and you find out that history. If you could conceive of that kind of Anthony Mann picture being the last of a trilogy, *Bad Company* would be the first of it.' Benton's admiration for the pictorial style of Ford or the narrative style of Mann seems to amplify his comments on the 'Protestant fundamentalism' of his own film. It would be precisely in the films of Ford and Mann that such fundamentalism originated.

Yet if *Bad Company* is a new version of such traditional Westerns, it is more an inversion of them than a reversion. In an Anthony Mann film, or in the many Westerns Ford made in Monument Valley, the backgrounds are what provide the realism, the film's documentary element. The foregrounds, the characters and their story, are a fantasy—an apple-pie myth of America. In *Bad Company* the relationship between background and foreground seems the opposite. It is the characterisations and story which attempt to achieve realism, while the background takes on the aspect of a fantasyland.

The background against which Benton filmed *Bad Company* is an endless expanse of Kansas prairie grass called the Flint Hills, a location which he selected in consultation with Gordon Willis. At first glance the Flint Hills might seem, in their dry treelessness, a setting comparable to Monument Valley. But the longer we look at them, the less real they are. Whether or not Benton chose these hills because he sensed this magical quality in them, as photographed by Willis they do have a way of transforming themselves. They begin to seem a properly ironic setting for a story in which boys go out to find adventure, for they are a benign wilderness, a never-never landscape. The indifferent, featureless countryside in children's stories can usually be traversed with the phrase, 'And our hero went along until . . .' Then a new adventure occurs, after which, 'And our hero went along until . . .—until the next adventure. This is what the hills of Eastern Kansas keep saying in *Bad Company*: 'And our heroes went along until . . . And our heroes went along until . . .'

For a while *Bad Company* seems as loosely episodic as a children's story. After that first meeting when Jake knocks Drew out to rob him, they meet again by chance at a minister's



'Bad Company': Barry Brown as Drew Dixon

house where Jake invites Drew to join his company of bad boys. The only obstacle is Loney, another member of the gang who insists that Drew pulls a stick-up as an initiation. Because he is too moral to steal, Drew fakes the robbery, furnishing the booty out of the \$100 his parents gave him. Then he and the boys set out for Virginia City. On the prairie, as in the magical landscape of many children's stories, life is the opposite of what it was back home. Here the high binders and low lifers, the ones who were not considered respectable back in civilised, adult society, are the only decent people. The boys are given kindly treatment and their money's worth by a man in a passing wagon who pimps for his very willing wife. And although the notorious outlaw Big Joe robs the boys when he happens on their encampment one morning, he saves Jake from being shot and offers him wise advice on how to survive in the wilds.

On the other hand, the solid citizens whom the boys run into are mean-spirited, hard-hearted and trigger-happy. A sodbuster charges them an exorbitant price for a meal

of swill and holds them at gunpoint while they eat. A sheriff with whom Drew pleads to save Jake from a mass hanging turns him down cold. And a farmer who has a pie stolen by Boog, the youngest of the boys, kills the little fellow with a shotgun in retaliation.

However mad and disjointed the action may sound, though, there is a kind of structural method to it. With the killing of Boog, which occurs about halfway through the film, Benton's method begins to be apparent too. Boog's death is really a murder of innocence in all the boys. Afterwards, events from the first half of the film seem to recur with more desperate consequences. People who appeared before appear again in a grimmer aspect. The boys' story recoils on itself, undoing the high jinks of the film's first part. It turns out that the story is not just a string of disconnected episodes, but a cycle of sorts—and not the sort that one customarily finds in children's stories, but a darker, more gloomy myth.

When the boys regroup after the shooting of Boog, Loney has decided that he and his brother should light out on their own, stealing the horses and Drew's watch before they go. Thus the boy who was the agent of Drew's initiation, binding the gang together at the beginning, now becomes the agent of the group's dissolution. Drew and Jake follow the defectors, finding them on a subsequent morning hanged from the only tree in sight. The culprits are Big Joe's gang, whom Jake and Drew also soon meet again. But this time Big Joe sits idly at his gang's camp while his henchmen shoot it out with Jake and Drew. To their amazement they manage to kill the three desperadoes, though for Drew the victory proves short-lived. In the aftermath of the gunfight, Jake notices the money Drew's parents gave him protruding from a hole in the shoe where Drew hid it.

Now Drew's adventures come full cycle: having begun being knocked out and robbed by Jake, Drew almost ends the same way. Jake does knock him out to rob him again, even though Drew this time is more likely to die of starvation and exposure than to recover. Nor is it at a minister's house that the boys are reunited this time, but at the hideout of Big Joe's gang, which Jake joins after deserting Drew. The sheriff's posse that Drew has joined flushes the gang with a murderous fusillade and prepares to hang the survivors. When Drew cannot persuade the sheriff to let Jake go, he helps his friend escape; and the film ends rather as did *There Was a Crooked Man*—with the capitulation of the story's only moral man to the incorrigibility of other men and the corruptibility of society.

The mainspring for much of this plot is inside that watch which Drew inherited from his dead brother. The watch becomes an emotionally loaded object the first time we see it, when Drew's parents give it to him as the one family keepsake he is to carry on his flight from conscription. The first night on the prairie Drew lends the watch to Jake as a gesture of friendship; and when Big Joe cleans the boys out next morning, Jake returns the gesture and salvages a little honour by saving it. In fact, although the watch is in jeopardy several times, it is only after the watershed of Boog's death that

Drew actually loses it. It is to retrieve the watch from one of Big Joe's sidekicks, who has taken it from Loney, that Drew risks a gunfight the second time he and the gang meet. In effect, then, one might say that the watch is used to connect episodes in the plot: it provides occasions for Jake and Drew to become attached to each other.

But besides working as a narrative device, binding the boys together like the links in its own chain, the watch also has a certain significance as an archetype, a symbolic artifact of the society the boys have left behind. We are not bludgeoned with this symbol the way we are with clocks in *High Noon*. Yet in contrast to the undifferentiated, unbounded landscape that the boys wander, a watch seems to encapsulate the principles of demarcation and measurement associated with civilisation. It represents the mere abstractness of all such principles and achieves a somewhat Daliesque presence. Out on this prairie the conventions, morality and laws of society finally appear as arbitrary as the regulation of day and night by watches.

Despite being so integral a part of the finished film, Drew's watch is a perfect example of the improvised way that *Bad Company* took shape. It's hardly surprising that Benton was not thinking in terms of the more remote symbolic properties of watches; but even this watch's appropriateness and usefulness for developing Drew's relationship with Jake seems relatively unpremeditated. In the original script, the watch was just a detail of episodes that began thirty pages before the point at which the film itself now begins. The death of Drew's brother at Chickamauga was to have been depicted, after which Drew's parents were to go to his room one night to urge that he flee conscription. And so forth.

To focus the film more on Drew's relationship with Jake, most of this material, including the watch, was later deleted from the script. But now a problem arose because, as Benton put it, 'Jake is someone whose words cannot be believed: you can only believe his actions.' To show his growing affection for Drew it was therefore necessary to devise some moot business, some pantomime, that could express his feelings aside from what he said. Benton says he remained vague for a long while about what that pantomime might involve, until he thought of rescuing the watch from the discarded early episodes.

Whatever sense the boys' story makes it makes for us, not for them, for only we can see the structure which Benton's editing has superimposed on their adventures. Without that structure, we would find their story as chancy as they find their lives. 'At rough cut,' Benton admits, 'there was a certain monotony about the episodic nature of the film: that was the big problem to deal with.' In order to deal with it he devoted seven months to the editing alone, though in that whole period he cut out only four minutes—'less than a minute a month,' Newman observes with mock impatience. The rest of the time Benton was simply arranging and rearranging episodes. All this post-production work was necessary, he feels, because during the shooting itself the film remained for him a series of little bits of business, a collection of vignettes made to be pleasing in and of themselves, but made without much certainty how, or whether, they might all go

together. In fact, the episode that turns out the best, most strategically placed scene in the entire film came about in an even more haphazard fashion.

The scene is the one in which the boys regroup after Boog has been killed—the one where Loney holds up Drew for his watch and departs with the horses. Though Loney has held Jake and Drew at gunpoint throughout the scene, when he moves towards the horses, Drew suddenly picks up some rocks and begins pelting him. Loney ducks the first few missiles, then tucks his pistol under his arm so that he can chuck a few rocks back before running for it.

Originally written into a scene that was never shot, this rock fight was finally put where it is as a result of a suggestion from someone not even working on *Bad Company*: Arthur Penn. By the time Benton was ready to do Loney's departure, he had decided that the boys must not be quiet and withdrawn at Boog's death, but full of adrenalin. He had them run up and down hills before each take so they would pant and be flushed. But Arthur Penn, whose advice Benton had been seeking whenever he felt stumped, thought something more was needed for the scene—'something to express grief, something physical to express grief.'

Benton feels that, 'Arthur is a great guy to show a script or a rough-cut to. He is a great structural critic and talks about what he calls "the dramatic profile." I took very much to heart any intuitions Arthur had about *Bad Company*.' The night before shooting Loney's departure Benton therefore huddled with Newman to concoct something appropriately 'physical', and eventually they remembered the rock fight intended earlier for a scene having to do with Indians. Despite being little more than an ad-lib, the resulting scene provides an ideal keystone for the overall structure of the film. The exchange of guns for rocks acts out perfectly the larger exchange of child's play for men's work that is occurring at this moment. Under that hail of rocks the scene becomes an ironical *rite de passage* between the bungled derring-do in the film's first half and the later adult violence.

As must be apparent from the number of discarded scenes that have been mentioned, even the basic pattern of repeated episodes only emerged as work on the film went along. At first, for instance, the boys were not to run into Big Joe's gang a second time. 'It may be improbable that the boys would ever run into Big Joe again,' Benton confesses. 'But we tended to be less interested in holding to a literal reality as we got into the script. The awful thing about movies now is that there is a kind of accepted reality, and it's a kind of literal, grainy . . . I don't really have the words for it. But there's something that is accepted as reality in films, and it's a kind of literalism. The whole point of view of Westerns today is, "this is how it really was." But that's just so much bull. It doesn't matter how it really was, and nobody knows anyway.'

The refreshing thing about this is a recognition that the new realism is just another convention, no more real than the old folklore of Ford and Mann which it would surpass. This attitude is especially apparent in the gunfight with the gang. Benton's stunt co-ordinator, Fred Waugh,

was on hand each of the four days it took to film the gunfight, 'to help people die in an awkward way, and not let anyone die in a terrific way,' as Benton puts it. But at the same time that gunfight is more stylised than any other scene in the film. It is fought in a wood that is the only exception we see to the treeless prairie. Benton's cutting of the scene is much too rapid to fit into the naturalistic approach taken elsewhere in the film. And the images of violence and death are themselves fantastic even though they are not idealised. The way the bodies are strewn about after the fight is over, the woods look more like a sculpture garden than a killing ground.

The scene has a style which Newman quite aptly describes as 'antic'. 'That gunfight is seen from the interior of those boys' heads,' Benton explains. 'It's the one time they get to win, and that's why the film is more stylised there than elsewhere.' Benton's mentor in his execution of the gunfight is Sam Peckinpah. 'One of the most wonderful gunfights ever in a movie was the last gunfight in *Ride the High Country*, where Joel McCrea and Randolph Scott stand not six feet away from the gang of outlaws and they just unload a hundred bullets at each other and keep missing and missing. That scene was an awakening for me that a gunfight is a specific event, not a mythological one.' For Peckinpah, though, a gunfight like this is still some kind of revelation of truth. For Benton it is an innovation in style—a question of artfulness more than truthfulness.

If *Bad Company* has origins in Peckinpah's films, then it must be admitted at least to have analogues in other recent Westerns. Stanley Jaffe's claims for its uniqueness are somewhat exaggerated, as producers' claims tend to be, because a trend toward de-psychologised, 'non-Jewish' Westerns began several years ago. Though Jaffe might prefer that *Bad Company* stand alone, it will have to stand in a line that stretches from somewhere back around *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* at least as far as *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean*—a line that includes *There Was a Crooked Man*.

While the 'fundamentalism' of *Bad Company* may not be unprecedented, however, that is nothing against it. At its best, from *Hell's Hinges* to *Red River*, the Western has been distinguished by the utter simplicity of its characterisations. This has been both its trademark and its limitation as an art form. Yet in order to express a more complex sense of human experience, it has not necessarily needed the more self-conscious sorts of heroes who dominated the Western during the 1950s and much of the 1960s. Instead of developing more sophisticated heroes, another possibility has always been for the Western to develop more sophisticated directors. The film-maker's view of his story must ultimately be realised not through some dramatic self-perception on the hero's part, but through the film-maker's own technique—the structuring of episodes, the choice of location and the symbolic use of props. The good thing about *Bad Company* is that it works in this way. Without violating or pre-empting the simple natures of his characters, Benton manages to get across in the narrative structure of the film his own, more ambiguous sense of their adventures. ■



'Out One Spectre'

FESTIVALS 73



'Distant Thunder': village women digging for wild potatoes

BERLIN

The difference between art and mart was strikingly in evidence at Berlin this year, with the main Festival provoking a minimum of excitement and the Young Film Forum proving the centre of interest and activity. It is not simply that the competitive Festival with its strictly disciplined Jury plays down all but PR-oriented discussions, while the Forum regards exchanges between film-makers, critics and the lay public as a vital part of festival activity—a distinction generally true of Cannes, and of Venice when it happened. But whereas the Cannes selectors this year had clearly bent

over backwards to cater to the changing audience, to the extent of including *La Maman et la Putain* in the main event, the programme for the Festival proper in Berlin was depressingly conservative. At the same time, the Forum, that other 'alternative event' subsidised by the Establishment, has preserved its radical idealism intact. The consistent quality of its 1973 selections was in strong contrast with the general run of high-gloss dross in the main showcase, and the economically impractical suggestion that the latter should be abolished altogether was frequently heard in *post mortem* discussions.

There was, at least, no doubt about where the Grand Prix belonged, and it was

gratifying for once to see it get there. Indeed, with newspaper headlines outside the cinema daily proclaiming the growing strength of the D-mark, Satyajit Ray's **Distant Thunder**, though set in 1942, had an inescapable relevance to the problems of the West and the present. Like the film (which is based on a book by the author of *Pather Panchali*), the title functions on several levels, at once literal and metaphorical. The subject is the impact on a Bengali village trying to consolidate its shaky steps towards security of the distant realities of World War II; and the opening credits (reminiscent of those of *Pather Panchali* but enhanced by Soumendu Roy's exquisitely graded colour photography) suggest the serenity of a Monet lily-pond ruffled by tropical storm conditions. Weather is one obstacle in the villagers' struggle, but so too are the less visible threats of cholera and famine, two dangers brought closer by the seemingly unrelated 'flying ships' whose buzzing increasingly interrupts the summer calm.

As the isolated and complacent community is affected by forces beyond its comprehension or control, its traditional values are eroded by hunger and despair. The Brahmin husband (Soumitra Chatterji), who has assumed leadership of the village as his birthright and given it in return the benefit of his religious, medical and pedagogic wisdom, is reduced to selling his services, first to buy a new sari for his beautiful young wife (Babita), then to obtain the few grains of rice necessary for their survival. The wife herself is reduced to digging for wild potatoes, scraping the bottom of the once idyllic river-bed for snails, and finally to selling her favours to obtain food for a starving friend who proves too weak to eat it.

As her innocence turns to tragic experience, the grain merchant grows fatter, and the scarred stranger—living like a leper on the edge of the community—grows more human. Even as he buys with rice from the humbled women the 'love' for which he has so long craved, he becomes less monstrous in their eyes and in ours. His sufferings portend theirs, and his disfigured face (ironically damaged by a firework) makes him the first, premature casualty of the fate which is to scar them all. In his most accomplished, tender and outspoken film to date, Ray shows his tiny group of characters to be victims of an international class system which they themselves once sought to exploit ('The peasants do all the work and we live off them. That's what's wrong'). Meanwhile, a familiar montage of newspaper headlines in unfamiliar characters builds to the crisis, and a closing title announces as a coda that 'In 1943, 3 million people died of hunger in Bengali Province.'

Apart from *Distant Thunder*, the Festival offered more occasional curiosities than solid achievements. The most flamboyant of these was Ulli Lommel's **Tenderness of Wolves**, produced by Fassbinder and featuring that same porcine *enfant terrible* as pimp and fence. Its subject is Haarmann, the child murderer who inspired Fritz Lang's *M* but who is here presented as a paedophile homosexual vampire. A small-time crook and informer, he philanthropically offers lodging to child runaways, bites them in the jugular vein and sodomises



Karin Thome's 'Overnight'

their corpses before chopping them up to sell as meat on the black market. The murders are presented in a series of striking and incomplete tableaux, and the tension between pity and terror is sufficiently maintained for the killer (brilliantly incarnated by a hairless Kurt Raab) to appear increasingly vulnerable as the extent and nature of his crimes is revealed. Yet though its minor characters and economic pressures still belong to the Depression, the story has been inconsistently transposed to the 1940s ('because it was easier to get the costumes'). It is also only fair to admit—the intentional fallacy notwithstanding—that my original enthusiasm for what looked like an expressionist revival has been dampened by the director's statement that his film (denounced, incidentally, by the German Homosexual Law Reform group) is a wish-fulfilment fantasy designed to enamour the audience of its psychopath hero.

With less pretensions, and therefore, regrettably, less critical attention, Canada's Donald Shebib proved himself to be a major international director in *Get Back*. Photographed by Richard Leiterman in appropriately muted colours, the narrative concerns the disastrous attempt by some misfit criminals—two of them superannuated surfers nostalgic for their California heyday—to escape from Toronto's drab poverty belt by means of a big-time pay-roll heist. The operation is marred by rivalries within the group, by their own incompetence, and by the inclemencies of the climate. There are several superlative performances (most notably from Bonnie Bedelia as the desperately decent second generation criminal who provokes the quarrel among thieves); Shebib and his scriptwriter (Claude Harz) further flesh out the crime-doesn't-pay formula by allowing their small-time hoods to function only as individuals, and by treating their quirks and foibles with a rare degree of unsentimental humanism; and the images of the snowbound robbery transcend even the ending of Losey's *The Criminal* in their bleak, suggestive power.

Only Rivette's *Out One Spectre* (shown in the Forum) equalled Ray's film in its dazzling mastery of the medium, also revealing the possibility of achieving a fluent transposition to the cinema of what has in the past been by comparison a hesitant and still essentially literary reworking of the Borgesian form. For its first half-hour—a series of apparently unrelated flash shots and brief, seemingly directionless scenes with an aggravating bleeper punctuating and even overlaying the dialogue—the film promises to be an unendurable experience. Then, miraculously, pieces of the gigantic jigsaw puzzle (possibly the world's most complex and expensive board game) begin to fit together, images and faces to recur and relate. Gradually, five separate threads emerge: a deaf-mute (J.-P. Léaud), who plays the harmonica like a Pan-pipe and calls himself the messenger of destiny, is handed cryptic documents whose sense he wishes to decipher; Juliet Bertho, a con-woman specialising in married men, decides to try her hand at robbery and blackmail; two theatre groups, one a collective and one directed by Michel Lonsdale, are respectively rehearsing *Seven Against Thebes* and *Prometheus*; and a boutique owner (Bulle Ogier) is trying to launch a radical newspaper.

But things are not what they seem in this world of perpetual motion. The deaf-mute starts shouting; the characters endlessly contradict statements they've made previously or in flashes forward; and the separate threads are seen to be intertwined once Léaud and Bertho (still apart, like a modern Hermes and Iris) discover clues to the existence of a secret society closely modelled on Balzac's *Groupe des treize*. The film's three organisations start to overlap, and prove in all to contain eleven members of the society, many of them connected by legal or emotional ties. Yet while two outsiders seek to penetrate the mysteries of the thirteen, two key figures remain obstinately absent: Pierre, allegedly the group's leader; and Igor, a member whom we and his wife (Ogier) suspect is sequestered in a locked room which he appears just to

have left when the camera finally gets inside it after nearly four hours of suspense.

Rivette consistently litters his non-narrative with internal and external cross-references and with clues which he denies have any essential meaning. He is not, he says, particularly keen on Balzac (who was contributed, like most of the ingredients, by one of the cast in what he insists is an essentially collaborative experiment); he can't play chess, though he likes watching other people play; and he's never got past the first pages of Proust. As with his characters, one has no way of telling whether he always, or ever, tells the truth. But whatever that is, the cryptogram scene (in which Léaud gets on the Balzac trail via *The Hunting of the Snark*) is a multi-dimensional improvement on the 'title' sequence from *Blow-Up*. And his film's final effect (provisional, of course) is of Balzac taken through the looking glass by Cortázar. Eight hours more—in the film's original, unseen 13-hour version—would not have been a moment too much.

Three other Forum films are specially worthy of mention. *Overnight*, a first feature made by Germany's Karin Thome for around £6,000, is a paradoxical film, a genuine original whose director/star vigorously declares that she believes, not in originality, but in individualism and in the need to distinguish between quotations and remakes. An ideologically rigid audience nearly lynched her for the individualism in her wryly observed portrait of life in the middle class drop-out belt, but apparently missed the quotations. These range as far afield as *Broken Blossoms*, though her odyssey of a promiscuous drop-out is most obviously a tour of Godard's career: from the amateurish car thefts of *Breathless*, through the abortive escapism of *Pierrot le Fou* and the auto-destruction of *Weekend*, and on to the Third World, where the heroine is finally lost in a spinning mirage.

Like his *Salamander*, Alain Tanner's *Return from Africa* wittily pinpoints just what it is that makes neutral Switzerland so different from its European neighbours. A childless couple, obliged to change plans after celebrating their departure for Africa, decide to save face by pretending to have left town, but soon lose their appetite for sex and takeaway food and discover the disadvantages of isolationism. Though the final message—that Third World problems can be found in your own back yard—is hammered home rather heavily, the film generally combines surface charm with political perception.

Finally, Oshima's *Night and Fog Over Japan*, made in 1960 and proving that he was already capable of making *The Ceremony* ten years before his public was ready for it. Also about isolationism, it explores—through a series of flashbacks radiating from the traditional wedding of a former student radical, and through ghosts conjured up by troubled consciences—the phenomenon of guilt by dissociation, and subtly denounces the family as a repressive political force. A witness at the wedding is a once actively militant professor, now satisfied with his administrative status. Shots of the 'present' ceremony dissolve into similarly arranged tableaux of the professor's own marriage at the end of the student demonstrations ten years earlier;

and the ghost who insists on testifying is that of the bride's former boyfriend, mysteriously missing since the radical group to which he and the professor both belonged released the innocent workman whom they had kidnapped as a Government spy. The message, spelled out rather clumsily in the subtitles, is that 'the past is the common heritage of those who are fighting for the future.' More happily, the visuals establish with haunting force the impossibility of denying the deterministic nature of the march of time.

JAN DAWSON

EDINBURGH

Finally reduced to *Playboy* fold-out essentials after a two-hour striptease, the heroine of Roman Polanski's *What?* declares that it is time the movie was over and exits on a lorry full of porcine flesh; Alexandro Jodorowsky winds up the search for true selfhood in *The Holy Mountain* by whimsically asserting another kind of reality ('Zoom back, camera!'); and Tom Ewell nicely anticipates them both in *The Girl Can't Help It* by adjusting the size of the screen to CinemaScope format and bringing up the glowing, true-to-life Deluxe colour.

Movies delighting in, and parodying, their own processes might be accused of an unrewarding narcissism (and fairly so in the case of several features at Edinburgh this year), but principally the *trompe l'oeil* effects, the jokes and cross-references, seem simply to reveal a delight in movies. And Edinburgh continues to be its own kind of celebration, managing—appropriately, but also somewhat miraculously—to dig away at odd, underprivileged corners of cinema, past and present, rewarding or less so, on a shoe-string budget.

Of the new films, *What?* was the most generally slated as a narcissistic indulgence, having neither the narrative coherence of Polanski's latter-day horrors (*Rosemary's Baby*, *Macbeth*), nor the sustained baroque invention of *Cul de Sac*. But some deliberately casual and very funny spirals—a sort of surrealistic gloss on a Feydeau farce—are wound round this tale of provocative innocence, and by the time Polanski arrives at the one climax (Hugh Griffith dying a *Citizen Kane* death) he seems to be literally working out Borges' description of *Kane* as 'a labyrinth without a centre.'

Sydne Rome, an American innocent armed only with a diary and the odd scrap of clothing and having just escaped from an attempted gang rape by the light of the full moon, wanders through a European villa by the sea, falling in and out of the clutches of the resident eccentrics and experiencing life's peculiar repetitions, that are somehow always the same but different. Hugh Griffith's toothless patriarch presides over it all; a malignant dwarf (played by Polanski) is forever cursing the debauchees and takes his nickname (Mosquito) from the insects that are part of the disease of life in this sunny limbo. The comedy of frustration—all throwaway jokes about erotic fetishes—is languidly indulged, and it is only at the end that a waiting-for-Katelbach despair begins to seep through, as Griffith—harassed on his deathbed by a cavorting

butterfly—confesses his complete impotence and his fear that 'some intricate plot is being hatched' but 'whether it's something inside me or outside me, I can't tell.'

For Polanski, spiritual corruption is a matter of subtle frustrations; for Alexandro Jodorowsky, it is something as physical as the stench of a charnel house. The first twenty minutes or so of *The Holy Mountain* are a familiar parade of obsessions, but more splendid than before, with candy-costumed chameleons pitted against thickly swarming toads in a circus charade on the conquest of Mexico, and a dryly witty science fiction digression to a brave new world where the skills of art, love and war are perfected by super-industry. With tongue-in-cheek showmanship, Jodorowsky (himself the film's mystic leader) takes his disciples and his audience through a ritual purging of the world, insisting that they 'destroy confusing self-images and their demands and limitations', and then completing his demonstration of the reintegration of the spiritual with the physical world on top of the Holy Mountain by waving his cinematic wand to dissolve the film and reclaim his own reality.

On a less grandiose level, the comedies of Frank Tashlin featured in one of the retrospectives make comic hay with a related obsession—usually to do with 'integrity' or the distinction between 'real people' and 'performers' in the films with a show biz setting, or generally with the distinction between what a person is and what he does—a pressing problem for the manic, eager-to-please clown of the Jerry Lewis comedies. Certainly Tashlin seems to anticipate a whole range of comedy that spoofs movies and their conjuring tricks, but the danger in retrospectively conferring importance on his sharp little comedies of self-deception is that they are taken too solemnly for social criticism. There is evidence for Tashlin being a distant relative of Billy Wilder (through George Axelrod), but his satire is usually directed against Hollywood's glamour machinery in its more blatant forms, and against television in most of its forms. When dealing with the more exotic conventions of *The Alphabet Murders* (his only film made

in England) Tashlin's humour turns admirably cool, and the film is an ironically elegant foray into Agatha Christie-land, faintly anticipating *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*.

There is rather more anarchic sport in George Romero's *The Crazies*, a slam-bang tale of hysterically escalating violence when a bacteriological warfare virus is accidentally released near a small American town, and a film which is unlikely to disappoint admirers of Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*. The director has talked of being influenced by *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, but the vision of social collapse in *The Crazies* is all too obvious to give it much depth as an allegory for Nixon's America, and the film's shock tactics—driving through cheap B-feature conventions too quickly for anyone to have time to object, and escalating the outrageous into the absurd with scarcely a pause for breath—have more in common with the maniacal energy and edge of *Dr. Strangelove*. Unfortunately, there is little creative energy evident in *The Killing Kind*, directed by a much earlier graduate to commercial cinema from the undergrowth of the film world, Curtis Harrington. Here he doodles with atmospheric touches of American Gothic, but is unable to work any new variations—neurotic son driven to murder by an environment of oppressive female flesh—on a type of horror film which Harrington has done a lot to perpetuate but little lately to revitalise.

First features this year tended to be honourable beginnings rather than particularly exciting developments. *Boesman and Lena*, made by the South African Ross Devenish, is a splendidly performed but rather unbalanced adaptation of a stage play by Athol Fugard (who appears here as Boesman) about the plight of two Cape coloureds who are driven from their shanty home by the white man's bulldozer and set themselves up again—'make another hole in the ground and live in it'—on a desolate piece of swampland. The film is virtually a monologue for Lena, a vivid record of her humiliation and thirst for life as she tries to hold together the barely remembered frag-

Jodorowsky's 'The Holy Mountain'



ments of their past in the face of Boesman's sullen brutality. But far from rooting the piece in a solid reality, the naturalistic opening in the shanty town only emphasises the film's later drift into attenuated stagecraft and phrase-making. Daryl Duke's **Payday**, the saga of a country and western singer, perfectly incarnated down to the last drop of sweat and the disingenuous, lecherous grin in Rip Torn, is a promising debut but, rather like Cliff Robertson's recently released first feature, *J. W. Coop*, works better with its drifting cameos of show business on the road—particularly a scene in which Torn's doleful bodyguard expatiates on the pleasures of cooking—than with its roughly motivated drama of the hero's decline and fall.

Doing much to redeem some generally mediocre Japanese fare was a selection of films by Shohei Imamura (who has been directing since 1959 and whose films have occasionally been seen in the West), revealing a remarkable variety of style and subject matter. **Nianchan—My Second Brother** is an astringently lyrical account of family survival in an impoverished mining town, seen through the eyes of a robust youngster and his diary-writing sister, gracefully constructed to give a feeling for time with its arrivals and departures, people finding or losing a place where they belong and moving on. History of a different sort in **History of Post-War Japan as Told by a Bar Hostess**: a compulsively watchable compilation of great events flickering by in newsreel while the bar hostess in question relates the story of her survival through the same era, only occasionally touched by those other events (a boy-friend aboard the *Pueblo*) but managing to make the most of the changes they bring (the American arrival at the end of the war). A remarkable documentary, achieving quite casually what many films have laboured to produce: the Tolstoyian sweep of historic events reflected in, or passing remotely by, the intimacy of individual lives.

RICHARD COMBS

MOSCOW

The amenities were unusually thoughtful, the new concert hall built into the Hotel Rossiya proved the perfect festival cinema, the guests and delegations from all continents enjoyed each other, the juries were picturesque, and the competing films were uniformly mediocre. Any deviation from the norm seemed remarkable: the makers of the Hungarian **Photography** were startled by the enthusiasm of its reception. We tried to be stirred by the heroic affectations of the Chilean entry, but most of the audience were defeated by the accumulating mix of tired symbols before its final image: naked girl leads white horse through smoke of total massacre. There were other enthusiasms, more expected—such as the by now inexplicable adulation accorded Stanley Kramer, who took it for granted. Though this time some of the noise could be credited to the latest Brezhnev-Nixon meetings, that will have, among other effects, the unexpected result of moderating all public criticism of the U.S., and the elimination of exhibited films, even American-made, critical of modern American society. The British entry, **Triple Echo**, just managed to squeeze into view past the selection committee's indignation that the army of its ally of thirty years ago could be shown as ignoble.

Those who attended the festival of children's films reported that the standard at the Young Pioneers' Palace was conspicuously higher. Despite our hesitating acceptance of the idea of a world slump in film quality, it was discouraging to see superficial and commonplace entries from Senegal, Japan, Algeria, Italy, Poland; their non-competing films (shown in public cinemas during the festival) were invariably more interesting. No criteria were provided, either publicly or privately, for the extraordinary accomplishment of the selection committee in assembling such a dull group of films to 'compete'. The deaths within the past year of Kozintsev, Kalatozov and Romm may have

removed their taste along with their guiding passionate influence.

The buyers and sellers, though, appeared satisfied. Sovexportfilm dominated the occasion, not always from behind the scenes. Perceptive critics and distributors left the Moscow festival without having seen the most hopeful and progressive works of the Soviet cinema today—another puzzle hard to explain.

Yet once the film market closed its active shop, the members of FIPRESCI were given something extra that partially filled this lack: films from the studios of the fifteen republics that make up the Soviet Union. These too were sometimes not the best work of their studios, scattered from the Baltic republics through Central Asia, but even their poorest films suggested wealths that we now feel obliged to watch more alertly. When the films were good, such as the Turkmenian **Nevestka** (*Daughter-in-Law*, 1972), the Moldavian **Lautari** (*Wandering Minstrels*, 1972), or Tolomush Okeyev's second film for the already famous new Kirghiz studio, **Bow to the Fire** (1970), they were good and original—these were the fresh voices that were missing from the festival. Okeyev challenged the threatening clichés of his writers' subject—the collectivisation programme of 1930 (he is too young to have witnessed it)—with a dramatic intensity not seen since Ermiler's *Peasants* (1934).

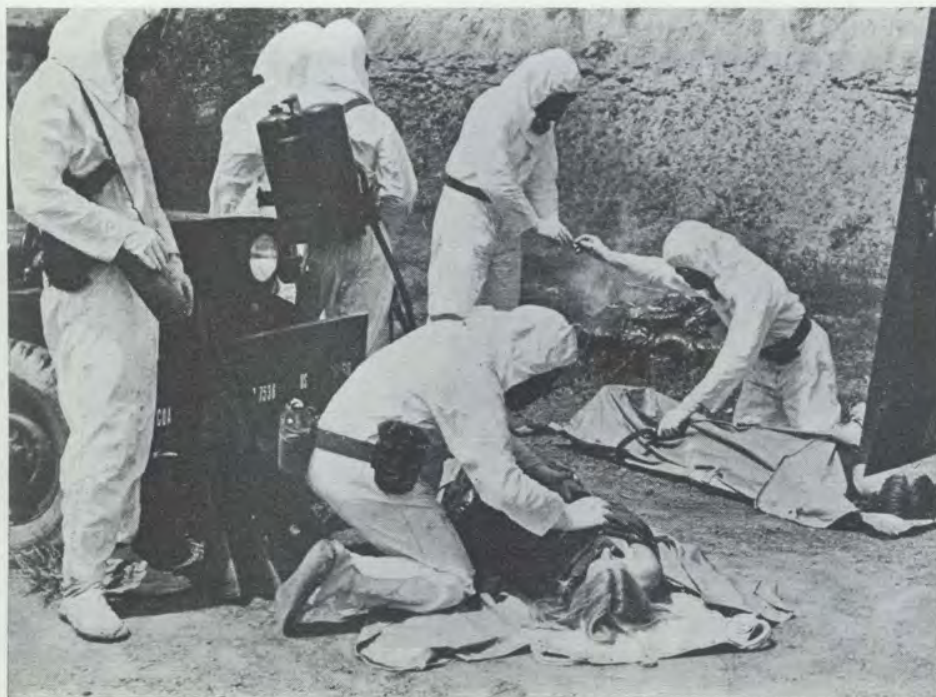
As only one film was to represent each national studio there was no time for other notable Kirghiz works we had heard praised; all agreed that one person, the writer Chinghiz Aitmatov, was responsible for his studio's reputation. A recent English translation of a selection of his stories chanced to contain the sources for five of the best Kirghiz films. It was this studio that invited two of today's best Russian filmmakers to direct their post-graduate débuts in Kirghizia: Konchalovsky (*The First Teacher*, 1966) and Larissa Shepitko (*Heat*, 1964). The only real disappointments in this group of national films were the humdrum contributions from the Baltic studios of high repute (we all expected something very good from Lithuania), and Tadzhikistan's **Sohrab and Rustam** (1972), certainly the most embarrassing costume film since the *Hercules* series.

Few of the interesting problems raised by these national films found time for discussion. One that interested me was that of influence and imitation. The vivid and sensitive *Lautari*, written and directed by the poet Emil Lotyanu, might not have been made except for the bold example of Sergei Paradzhanov and his *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors*; while the Ukrainian studio demonstrated that to imitate the appearance of a Dovzhenko film was the most ungrateful homage to his memory.

Despite festival and colloquium, five of the best recent Soviet films rarely exposed on foreign screens were to be seen in Moscow's public cinemas: Ioseliani's magnificent and modest *Singing Blackbird*, Shepitko's totally personal *You and I*, Paradzhanov's dazzling *Sayat-Nova*, Shukshin's latest realistic comedy, and *Andrei Rublev*. Not bad for one city, but why couldn't its film festival have shown such artistic adventures?

J.L.

George Romero's *'The Crazies'*





The old illusionist: Orson Welles. Left to right: Elmyr de Hory, Clifford Irving, Howard Hughes

TELL ME LIES

John Russell Taylor

The first and most impenetrable mystery about Orson Welles' latest film is what, exactly, it is called. The place in the film which might be expected to provide the answer is strangely ambiguous. First we see the screen filled with the word *FAKE* over and over again, small, running diagonally, as though to form a background. Then imposed on this, a question-mark. This seems to leave open three possibilities: that it is called *Fake*, that it is called *Fake?*, or that it is called *?*. Sources close to Welles incline to the third solution, and generally refer to it as 'Question Mark'. But it does seem characteristic of the old illusionist that he should help to sabotage an already unclassifiable and perhaps not very commercial feature by presenting right off this area of puzzlement. How, after all, do you start to sell a film you cannot even certainly refer to, except as what's-its-name, you know, that film?

If the spectral presence of the word 'fake' in or around the title rings any bells, it is meant to. Anyone with an interest in the eccentricities of the art market and its shady fringes will probably recall this as the title of a book by Clifford Irving about Elmyr de Hory, often called the greatest art forger of them all, the virtuoso inventor of hundreds of Picassos, Matisses, Dufys, Modiglianis, etc.—more, he gives us to believe, than any-

one dare suspect, many of them hanging in respected places in the best galleries of the world. Some five years ago François Reichenbach made a short documentary about de Hory, showing us his seemingly idyllic, heavily name-dropping life in retirement on Ibiza and talking, as well as to de Hory himself, to a lot of friends, associates and observant bystanders. Among the latter, Clifford Irving, who had at that point been researching *Fake*, and was quite expansive on the subject of de Hory in particular and forgery, its means and motives, in general.

The film was shown around on television, then filed away. But that, of course, was before Irving himself hit the headlines as the forger of the supposedly official autobiography of Howard Hughes. Which is where Welles comes in. Obviously he has, presumably some time around the middle of last year, while the subject was inescapable, seen the Reichenbach film and realised the ironic sub-text it contains: here we have Clifford Irving talking about forgery possibly at the very moment that he was conceiving his own great enterprise in that line. Hence 'Question Mark'. In the course of some 72 minutes the material filmed by Reichenbach is taken apart, rearranged, gone over again backwards and forwards, as Welles speculates on Irving's situation at the time, finds curious parallels between de Hory's career and Irving's, applies Irving's words about de Hory to

Irving himself and manages here and there to turn the tables by putting de Hory, filmically speaking, in the position of commenting on Irving just as Irving has been commenting on him.

All of this, you will gather, is done with material actually shot (much of it rather prettily) by Reichenbach, who gets some sort of credit as the producer or presenter of the Welles film. Welles' contribution is the angle of vision, some very fancy effects of montage, and the framework into which the material is put. This includes a discourse on magic and deception by Welles himself, who pervades the film, performing a few offhand effects of prestidigitation, massively cloaked, or posing the way film-makers are meant to in the labs, intensely scrutinising a foot or so of film held picturesquely up against the light. Also in evidence is a spectacular-looking Yugoslavian girl who strides glamorously around Paris while Welles mutters darkly about strange coincidences connected with her and promises that all will eventually be made clear. And then there is a certain amount about the impossible search for Howard Hughes himself, represented mostly by zoom shots of the outside of his Las Vegas eyrie, evidencing no signs of habitation.

Clearly this is Welles harking back to something like his original radio format of programmes which he prepared and presented and pervaded, commenting and acting roles and nudging his audience towards the right attitudes. This particular film is enjoyable and holding, if somewhat over-extended (one is very conscious of a little material being made to go a very long way, with the quickness of the hand not always managing to deceive the eye). And it is disappointing that there is not more actually shot by Welles. But the old master has a couple of tricks up his sleeve for the conclusion. Everything, he assures us at the outset, that he will show us in the next sixty minutes is true, however incredible it may seem.

As the film progresses, in wider and wider circles, the Yugoslav girl keeps recurring, until finally we get her story. She was, it appears, holidaying in the south of France when she attracted the attention of Picasso, who was painting in the same village. (This is all very funnily done, with an ingenious use of still photographs of Picasso edited in such a way as to establish, jokily, his physical presence.) He begs to paint her; she agrees, on condition that she will own all the paintings so produced; he agrees, provided that they remain her property alone. At the end of her holiday she goes off with two dozen superlative late Picassos. A few months later, Picasso reads a review of a revelatory exhibition of his latest work in an obscure Left Bank gallery. Furious, he rushes up to Paris, charges into the gallery concerned, and finds—two dozen superlative late Picassos he has never laid eyes on before. The girl explains: her grandfather, now dying, is the greatest art forger of them all, and this tribute to his genius constitutes, as it were, her going-away present to him. And is it true, asks Welles? Look at your watches, ladies and gentlemen. Seventy-two minutes ago I promised you that everything you would see in the next sixty minutes was true . . .



ERNEST LINDGREN 1910-73

Ernest Lindgren, founder and Curator of the National Film Archive, and one of the great pioneers—along with Henri Langlois in France and Iris Barry in America—of the cause of film preservation, died on July 22 after a long illness. We print tributes here by David Robinson, film critic of *The Times*, and by Jerzy Toeplitz, formerly Rector of the Polish National Film School, President of the International Federation of Film Archives from 1948-1972, and now Director of the Australian National Film and Television School.

I knew Ernest Lindgren for exactly twenty years, since I applied to him for my first job (I didn't get it). Even then he seemed to have been there for ever. He *was* the Archive. He had seen and been the very beginning; and it was hard to recognise, when he became ill last year, that he would not be there for ever. This character of monolith was right in a man who had borne the Archive (for its first quarter century it was called the National Film Library), unfaltering, through its difficult and dangerous eras of formation and expansion.

Equally, the character could be desperately frustrating at moments when you were in dispute with him—which was from time to time inevitable, since the very reason for being professionally involved with Ernest was precisely the aim of snatching, for one reason or another, the treasure he was guarding. A battle with Ernest was *always* frustrating, of course, because in the end you knew he was always right; and no tricks of debate could ever get past his simple logical clarity, or make him compromise the exact principles on which the Archive had been founded. Nor could he be betrayed into undermining his case with anger or personalities. However ferocious the paper dispute, the next time you met him he was just the same, with his unreserved grin and easy laugh, his kindness, his intense and proud interest in the progress of everyone who had moved on from the Archive, even though they may have left in dudgeon or despair.

Any battle with Ernest was of course likely to be over one of the two constant principles upon which he had created his Archive: that the first concern is preservation, and master material must never be exposed to the risk of projection; and that the faith and rights of donors must never

be abused by unauthorised use of films. Of course this dedication was maddening when you simply wanted to see a picture. Now that he is gone, though, it is impossible not to feel a nightmare terror lest some successor might some time yield and compromise and put in jeopardy Ernest's impeccable legacy.

The necessary role of Cerberus, the dedication to the technical problems of conservation and cataloguing in which his Archive laid down standards for the whole world, and the growing bureaucratic concerns of an ever-growing organisation, could still never quite hide the first thrill of the 24-year-old, two-pound-a-week information officer who was given the key of the cupboard where a few cans of old film were kept; and saw a vision. In the summer of 1935 he wrote in *SIGHT AND SOUND* (already keeping excitement in control with measured phrases): 'It is inevitable that films will disappear if their preservation is left only to the vagaries of chance. Films, moreover, constitute a new and valuable kind of historical document. They stand alone in their ability to record for all time all kinds of action, from the most epoch-making to the most personal. To let these new records go out of existence, simply through lack of effective foresight, will be an action for which posterity will hardly have cause to thank us.'

The first thrill he felt in his job is communicated in *The Art of the Film*, a book which in the twenty-five years since it was written has lured many of us to the cinema. He could still reveal the excitement in later years every time some step seemed to bring nearer his dream of Statutory Deposit of films (he always liked to make comparisons between the work of his Archive and the British Museum); and the last article he wrote, for *BFI News* last October, is full of enthusiastic plans for making Archive films more readily available.

This was not by any means a new phase of Archive policy. Those who were deceived by the Cerberus side of Ernest should not forget that it was he who first conceived and set afoot the idea of a distribution library, barely weeks after the Archive was established. 'The good archivist,' he wrote in that last article, 'may be a hoarder by nature, but he is not a miser, wanting to hide his treasures from every other eye. Indeed, the dream of every serious archivist would be to see the films he has acquired and preserved made available, projected again and again,

so that anyone who needs to see them and everyone who *wants* to see them may do so.' He was such a nice man, and a human man, and a formidable colleague, that we tended to forget that he was history.

DAVID ROBINSON

For twenty-five years I worked very closely with Ernest Lindgren in the International Federation of Film Archives, known as F.I.A.F. The news of his retirement from the post of Curator of the National Film Archive on June 30 was a great shock to all his friends and colleagues. But we hoped that his health would improve and that he would be able to participate in F.I.A.F.'s work. Less than a month later we learned that Ernest had died. His departure from our ranks became final.

Twenty-five years of common struggles left many vivid memories. In the dramatic days at the end of the 1950s, when the very existence of the Federation was in danger, Ernest was present and active, defending the unity of the F.I.A.F. Later we lived together the happy days of victories and successes. It is difficult to believe that somebody so much alive and full of vigour is no longer with us—that he will not attend the next meeting of the Executive Committee—that he will not speak at the next congress. We always listened with the greatest attention to everything he said. He was the senior film archivist, representing more than forty years of experience. We respected him for being a true statesman, full of wisdom and personal charm.

For some of our younger colleagues, enthusiastic and ever impatient beginners, Ernest might have appeared as a conservative, too cautious and prudent. In almost all archives there exists an inherent conflict between the two spheres of activity: the preservation of films and the showing of them. Ernest never forgot to stress that without the proper preservation of prints no projection would be possible. If one does not preserve films, there can be no film archive. Only when you are assured that the original print—positive or negative—will not be damaged, are you allowed to go on with projection. A film archive works for the future—this simple lesson should not be forgotten.

Ernest will be remembered as a man of principle. He defended with zeal his point of view, but without unnecessary obstinacy. He listened to the arguments put forward by his colleagues. He never played personal or political games in F.I.A.F., seeing the Federation as a highly professional organisation of people deeply devoted to the cause of the conservation of the artistic and historical heritage of the cinema.

I met Ernest for the first time after the war, in Copenhagen, in 1948. F.I.A.F. was then a small federation of ten archives. Twenty years later, in London, Ernest was host at the annual congress and he welcomed the delegates and representatives of more than forty film archives. Their growth and development, all over the world, is in great part due to his work, both at home and in the international field, as one of the F.I.A.F. leaders.

We use the expression 'film pioneer' in reference to the early inventors of various apparatus or to the first film-makers at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ernest

Lindgren was a film pioneer of another kind. Thousands and thousands of films, saved from destruction and preserved for posterity, will witness in years to come his work, his dedication and love of the cinema. His friends in F.I.A.F. film archives will miss him sorely and will remember him with affection and gratitude.

JERZY TOEPLITZ



OLWEN VAUGHAN 1905-73

The sudden death of Olwen Vaughan while on holiday in Greece has deprived countless friends in the world of film, as well as in many other walks of life, of one of the best-loved and most colourful personalities of this era.

In the early Thirties she came south from Liverpool, where her clergyman father was an enthusiastic promoter of the then comparatively new film society movement, and joined the newly formed British Film Institute, of which she was for some time Secretary. The 1930s was a time when the original pioneer Film Society had run out of steam, and it was Olwen who ensured a certain continuity by mounting a series of shows at the Forum Cinema under Charing Cross Bridge, including a fascinating revival of Lotte Reiniger's full-length silhouette film *The Adventures of Prince Achmet*. This Forum season presaged the exhilarating success of her New London Film Society seasons at the Scala Theatre in the years immediately following the war. These included three massive obituary tributes—to Lubitsch in 1947 and to Griffith and Eisenstein in 1948, each accompanied by detailed annotated programmes; revivals of great screen classics; and also a number of premieres—not least that of *6 Juin à l'Aube* and *Lumière d'Été* by Jean Grémillon. On that occasion it was a measure of Olwen's magnetism that despite the grounding of all regular airlines by fog, Grémillon chartered a small private plane from Paris, and somehow managed to arrive at the Scala in time to make his personal appearance.

It was just after the war, too, that Olwen became Films Officer for UNRRA, and was responsible for obtaining much valuable film material on refugees and rehabilita-

tion—not least some remarkable uncensored reels from the Ukraine and Byelorussia shot by a young protégé, Peter Hopkinson, who, as a result, became one of the *March of Time's* key travelling cameramen.

The boundless energy which Olwen devoted to everything she did is evidenced in the fact that on top of all her other activities she ran, from 1940 until the time of her death, Le Petit Club Français in St. James's Place, which eventually became (after film) the love of her life. This was originally formed on her initiative as a meeting place for the French citizens who after the fall of France came over to join de Gaulle, but it rapidly swelled into a social centre for all sorts of people, and especially those concerned with the arts (not least, of course, film). If during the war years you heard that Orson Welles, say, or Rita Hayworth was in town, the practical thing would be to try the French Club first and the Savoy second.

Her unerring instinct, one might indeed say her 'nose' for films, made her early on a close friend of Henri Langlois and Mary Meerson at the Cinémathèque Française; and there were many occasions when Olwen, sometimes in conjunction with them and sometimes alone, uncovered rare prints of missing film masterpieces.

Being perfectly bilingual, she was as happy and at home in Paris as she was in London. If you ran into her—probably amongst the *bouquinistes* along the banks of the Seine—she would as like as not rush you off to a small Left Bank cinema where a film like De Sica's *Shoeshine*, completed only a few weeks ago, would unroll before your astonished eyes.

This 'nose' for film, together with an encyclopaedic knowledge based apparently on total recall, came very much into its own when she became John Grierson's aide on his television programme *This Wonderful World*. Olwen travelled thousands of miles and attended countless festivals, bringing back film after film from which Grierson could extract sequences for his kaleidoscopic review of the best and rarest in cinema.

Wherever she went she made lasting friendships. She was passionately loyal to those she loved and respected; but the pompous, the fake and the fatuous got short shrift from her, as too did anyone who transgressed the unwritten but well-understood rules of Le Petit Club. Which is perhaps where to end, remembering especially her celebration of René Clair every *Quatorze Juillet* when—by what magical persuasion of the local authorities one always wondered—she decorated St. James's Place with flags and bunting, and there was dancing in the street.

Her many friends will feel a deep emptiness which may perhaps in time be partly mitigated by memories—memories of the bi-weekly *gigot d'agneau* of which she was so justly proud; or of the honour of being asked to sit at her special table in the restaurant; or simply of the sound of that deep chuckle by which she expressed her delight in all things good and pleasurable—from the works of the greatest film-makers to the thank-you letters and drawings from the children who, all of them, were her favourite guests.

BASIL WRIGHT

Interview with Bellocchio

from page 199

I do tend to look at things as if through a microscope. This is crucial to *In the Name of the Father*, and in this connection there is a scene I'm very happy with, the one where Angelo watches his friends through his peephole. Exactly as if he were looking at insects under a magnifying glass. Seeing his friends' little weaknesses, he decides for the thousandth time that he'll stir up trouble in this menagerie.

You made a lot of sketches for the film.

I find writing more and more difficult. A script leaves me dissatisfied because there is always something unexpressed—something provisional, incomplete. Consequently, writing a screenplay has become like a step backwards; when I know the dynamics of a scene, it's stupid to have to translate it into words. Unfortunately, a producer needs to read what he's supposed to be producing if he is going to approve it, so I can't just show him sketches—I have to apply myself to the increasingly impossible effort of writing.

Slap the Monster on Page One

The director, Sergio Donati, who used to be a scriptwriter for Sergio Leone, fell ill and I was asked to replace him at a moment's notice. It was take it or leave it. I took it on because you have to learn how to adapt yourself to anything.

In practice I shot nearly every scene of *Slap the Monster on Page One*, but it still feels like a film which I took over. Nevertheless, the experience was useful. Audiences aren't concerned with knowing the constraints I experienced or the problems I had to overcome when they're making up their minds about a movie. If I've any regrets, they derive from an extremely aristocratic attitude: you ought to wear your best clothes when you are working—and I didn't.

Unfortunately, *Slap the Monster* was heavily attacked in the orthodox left-wing press because they saw it as a far left film. Before I took over, Donati's script was structured almost like a Hollywood movie. It was a story about how a killer is used. The suspect was a hippy, and to keep the silent majority happy, the newspaper editor (Gian Maria Volonté) used the incident to attack hippies in general, drug addicts, anyone on the fringes of society.

As I saw it, that story wasn't very interesting, and since we were in the middle of the elections at the time, I thought—or rather we thought, since Goffredo Fofi also worked on the script changes—that I'd pitch the film right in the middle of the election campaign. At the time Italy was going through a period of extreme social tension—as it is now—because of a series of obscure events and assassinations which had shaken public opinion. We could have said it was all as fixed as though it had been set to music: the conservative parties would win the elections—as in fact they did—and keep their position of strength. But we thought it would be more interesting to show how the police used whatever suspicions they had to make open accusations against a leftist; the majority parties were using this strategy of tension as part of their campaign, and the police keep it on the boil.

Film REVIEWS



James Coburn (Garrett) and Kris Kristofferson (Billy the Kid)

Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid

The films of Sam Peckinpah seem fated to interference by producers wanting different soundtracks, distributors wanting different lengths, and censors wanting different visuals. Although one would have imagined that with *The Getaway* tucked blandly into his reputation Peckinpah's right to have his own way would be recognised, his new film has reportedly once again been rearranged and shortened by twenty minutes. In Jan Aghed's article on the making of *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (MGM-EMI) in the Spring SIGHT AND SOUND, Rudolph Wurlitzer described how the film was to begin with a flash-forward to Garrett's death, set up by the same men who had wanted him to kill Billy. Nothing of this, with its echoes of existential irony, in the version that reaches the British screen; the echoes of Garrett's future are certainly in the film, but at a less resonant pitch. More noticeably absent, perhaps, are a couple of subplots: one involves Emilio Fernandez (the throat-cutting villain from *The Wild Bunch*) to whom Billy is bidding a tender farewell almost before they've met, while the other is a running feud with Chisholm, the cattle-baron employer of an army of sadistic henchmen, whom nobody meets at all.

But whatever has been removed from Peckinpah's latest film seems, curiously enough, to have done it little harm. The story of Billy the Kid has been told often enough for its basic outline to require only the lightest of sketches, while Peckinpah's own nostalgia for obsolescent gunmen has become as much of a trademark as Ford's skylines. The outlaw turned sheriff, the obsessive pursuit from one decrepit town to the next, the two friends who must shoot it out

to the death—the territory has been so well explored that few members of Peckinpah's audience will be entirely without map references.

Myths don't require surprises; instead they demand ritual, a formal pattern that can be repeated to infinity, and grandeur. And they need (as Fritz Lang pointed out in *Le Mépris*) the vitality of perpetual reinterpretation. The less that is explained in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, the more that is explicable—not only in terms of plot but also in terms of metaphor. Fernandez may have been a member of the Kid's gang in the past, or no more than a passing shepherd with a daughter susceptible to rape; what matters here is his presence, the sense of other times and other places, the glimpse of another life going by in another direction. The enigma of his relationship with Billy is balanced, as it turns out, by Billy's series of fights with Chisholm's men, a tide of casual murderers that Billy is constantly trying to stem. The invisible Chisholm, whose nature can be deduced from Garrett's contemptuous meeting with his would-be hirers (he informs them tersely where they can stuff their money), lurks in the wings like a spider, occasionally casting a barbed-wire thread across the screen. He is progress, fate, and the future; he means the ruthless destruction of the values that Garrett and the Kid once knew; he is the capitalist, the money-spreader, and the law. He is even, you might say, the Hollywood producer. Without him, the myth could not exist.

It's tempting to see in Rudolph Wurlitzer, who wrote *Two-Lane Blacktop*, a link between Peckinpah and the Monte Hellman Westerns where the fascination lies in the rumours, the unseen events, the indefinite motivations. Certainly it is consistent with the Wurlitzer-

Hellman film that *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* is a patchwork of incidents and uncertainties, an aimless ramble from one contest to the next, a man's world in which pride, loyalty and affection are monosyllabic. Yet it was the same for *Junior Bonner* or *The Wild Bunch*; Peckinpah's characters come to his films complete with memories, and their present behaviour is the only guide we are allowed to their past—other than what we care to create for ourselves.

So the scene that now begins the Garrett/Kid story could hardly be better: Billy's old friend Pat, father figure, mentor, partner, turns up just when times are so boring that the gang can find nothing better to do than shoot the heads off chickens, and he offers the go-for-broke challenge that they both need and they both cherish. Leave the territory (forget the glory, betray the self) or face the gallows. Or, of course, fight. Billy is delighted to see no choice among the alternatives. 'It feels like times have changed,' says Garrett, meaning that he doesn't feel like changing with them. Another suicide mission, like the charge among the French lancers in *Major Dundee*, or the last act of the *Wild Bunch*, has begun.

What follows is a series of sacrifices. Trapped in a hut by Garrett's ambush, Billy's two companions allow themselves to be shot apart in cheerful, matter-of-fact mood ('Time to take a walk? Hell, Yes!'), and Billy stands with arms wide as if to embrace his captor. Escaping from jail, as Garrett has clearly meant that he should, Billy kills his two guards with smiling unconcern, and they accept their deaths in horrified resignation ('He's killed me too,' says the second, waiting for Billy to shoot). Garrett's enlisted deputies, grizzled copies of himself except that they are closer to stagnation, are then given remarkable death scenes of their own. Slim Pickens, dragged into an insignificant gunfight, afterwards clasps his wounds in the sunset, placidly dying beside a river. And Jack Elam, unexpectedly encountering Billy at a trading post, tries hopelessly to cheat in their duel only to find, without surprise, that Billy cheated at the first step. The scene is completely ritualistic, performed before a row of silent children and their mother, its incongruity as disturbing as a scene from Pinter. An audience attends each sacrifice at the Garrett/Kid altar, immobile and inactive witness to the creation of the myth, a classical Chorus participating only so far as to provide a horse or a blanket, or to hurl a final clod of earth at Garrett's departing back to remind us that history will favour Billy, not him.

The missing scene of Garrett's death is embodied in that clod of earth, but what would have made it even more superfluous is the way Peckinpah films the killing of Billy, when Garrett's second shot hits his own mirror image. With the death of the Kid, Garrett himself is dead; he has destroyed what he used to be and at the same time he has destroyed his reason for living. His vigil over the body restages the death of Pickens beside the river, a slow ebb of life and purpose. Earlier, beside the same river, Garrett has watched a cumbersome boat go by, its owner shooting at bottles for evidently much-needed target practice; Garrett's attempt to join the contest earns him only a shotgun blast past his ear, and boatman and sheriff confront each other warily until the current takes the floating family out of range. The scene could be cut so easily that one wonders how it survived. Could someone have noticed that with its extraordinary layers of mood and meaning it is very nearly the heart of the film?

Changes of direction may have been indicated by the subjects of Peckinpah's last four films, but with *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* he demonstrates reassuringly that his first love hasn't lost its potency. Beautifully shot by John Coquillon, the film certainly makes better watching than *Straw Dogs* or *The Getaway* (the scene of Billy playing cards with one jailer and riling the other, while kids play on the gallows

outside, is a superbly composed example), and the various towns in which it's set look so authentic as to have survived intact, by some miracle, the lesser myths that have passed through them since 1881.

The only major eccentricity (Peckinpah's West is a catalogue of eccentrics) which is on the edge of not working is the figure of Bob Dylan, his motivations and behaviour more peculiar than obscure, his own Dylan myth and brittle self-possession a slightly uneasy anachronism beside the comfortable performances of James Coburn (Garrett) and Kris Kristofferson. (William Bonney was never as robust as this, but Kristofferson is otherwise the ideal Peckinpah hero.) And as the ultimate seal of approval, the director himself pops into the film to urge Garrett to complete the ritual by killing the Kid, as if Peckinpah feared that the legends might change and die without him to guide their perpetuation. Where *Wild Bunch* used brute force, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* favours elegy; the effect is less shattering, but the tone of savoured melancholy is just as haunting.

PHILIP STRICK

The King of Marvin Gardens

Bob Rafelson's third film, *The King of Marvin Gardens* (Columbia-Warner), opens with a bleak declaration of bankruptcy. Held in long, tormented close-up, splash of light picking tic-ridden features out of the darkness, David Staebler (Jack Nicholson) hesitantly confides a memory of the day he and his brother Jason deliberately allowed their grandfather, choking on a fishbone, to cough himself to death. Suddenly, a flashing red light leads to the revelation that he is in fact on the air, a late-late show personality on Philadelphia radio dispensing stories and philosophical reflections suited to the introspective intimacies of the small hours; and he sets off home through a nocturnal limbo of dark streets and empty office blocks (one hollow glass facade proclaiming itself the Industrial Valley Bank) for a journey taking him down a long flight of steps, down passageways to an all-night café, down again to the subway. Despite the intimations of inferno, this is not so much a descent into hell—back home, grandfather proves to be alive and well and pointedly greets him with a fit of coughing—as a journey back down the corridors of time to a small peak of security, the upstairs bedroom which looks as though nothing had changed since boyhood days, and from which he spins his life into fantasy.

With its double deception at the audience's expense, this opening sequence nevertheless tells a truth: that David Staebler, nursing a childish sense of inadequacy (grandfather would never let him win at casino, played mocking practical jokes like hiding model trains in his hamburger), has retreated from competition. Like Shakespeare's Prospero, he is a man stranded within the island of his own mind, using its powers of magic to keep the clash between freedom and responsibility, spirit and matter, safely insulated from the business of living. The literary ivory tower reduced all the more to absurdum in that, as David confides to his tape-recorder, 'No one reads any more. I have been deprived of my literary right and I crave an audience.' But you don't, in the land of opportunity, opt out quite so easily from the inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness.

Comes an urgent summons from brother Jason (Bruce Dern), at present in jail in Atlantic City; and there, blinking in the sudden sunlight like some uprooted nocturnal creature in his neat black suit and mild-rimmed glasses, David is whisked back into a world of hustle and graft. Another illusion, of course, since he has just left 'industrial valley', while the Atlantic City which Jason proudly displays is a mirage of dreams and paper wealth. Brilliantly, Rafelson

juggles the myth of Atlantic City (it provided the place names for the game of Monopoly) and its reality (a playground for the class-cultured rich, now grinding down into seaside vulgarity) to suggest that the American dream is—like David's grandfather—alive and well though getting distinctly frayed at the edges.

Huge, resonantly exclusive hotels lining the front like Venetian palazzi and genteelly decaying along with the occasional guest tottering past on crutches; the Boardwalk, once rivalling the Promenade des Anglais and now a dismal echo of Blackpool or Southend, given over to harpy busloads of tourists trailing cameras, husbands, guides; and behind the scenes, black Mafia tycoons planning their takeover bids with the obliging cooperation of white front men. Here, a throw of the dice gets you out of jail, a fistful of paper promises buys hotels, and the word 'Go' brings enough credit for easy living. And here Jason, after a lifetime of wheeling and dealing on the lower slopes to success, at last sees his way to the realisation of his childhood dream of owning an island paradise.

The beautiful irony of Rafelson's film is that it demonstrates the ultimate interchangeability—and vanity—of the brothers' aspirations. David tries to fashion his reality into fantasy; Jason tries to make his fantasy a reality. A simple enough notion in itself (the only acceptable option out of the rat race being the adoption of intellectual pursuits), but one that is worked out with considerable subtlety as David becomes increasingly involved not only with Jason's dream, but with Jason himself. With time already hithering and thithering like Anna Livia Plurabelle in the ambivalent time scale of Atlantic City—pre- and post-Depression ethos overlaid by modish, cut-price cynicism—the past becomes present for the two brothers, reviving the mysteriously opaque, Pinterish love between them (David, like Aston in *The Caretaker*, has even done time in an asylum).

Childish complicity, flowering in the warmth of Atlantic City's gigantic fun fair and drum majorette parades, culminates in the extraordinary game of nostalgic dreaming for the future when they take over the deserted Convention Hall just before the witching hour of midnight to stage, with the aid of a solitary electrician, Jason's ageing girl friend Sally (as Wurlitzer cheer-leader) and the latter's exquisitely pre-Raphaelite prostitute of a step-

daughter (as sole competitor), a Miss America contest designed to prove that when they do finally achieve their island paradise, they will have the star attraction to keep its coffers filled.

After midnight, the magic ends; and as David's complicity in Jason's plans increases, so by an inevitable corollary does his sense of competition. 'You're not the king of me,' he has reminded Jason, and follows up with half-joking threats of palace revolutions on the island. Is David's betrayal of Jason motivated by jealousy as he recognises that Jason's artistry as a dreamer is greater than his ever will be? Or by his understanding, as an innately practical man, that Jason's whole scheme is an impractical pipe-dream? The answer, it seems to me, is contained in the elusive tangle of relationships which is almost Nabokovian in its sense of the sweet perversions that animate and accompany the quest for love.

It would take a ream of words to explore the undercurrents of innocence and profanity, incest and homosexuality, dependence and domination, which ultimately bind the quartet into a tormented parody of a family circle tearing itself to pieces. Suffice it to note here that David's hypothetical declaration of total involvement with Jason as he tells the story of the grandpatricide that never happened ('I think that at that moment my brother and I became accomplices for ever') is echoed by Jessica's matter-of-fact statement as she explains how her step-mother let her tag along as a child on callgirl dates, then initiated her into a double act, but (as David balks at the enormity) was after all never under any obligation to look after her in the first place: 'That's what I mean by being connected to someone.' And parallel with this, Sally's moment of self-abnegation when she realises, at the Japanese dinner, not only that David is betraying Jason but that Jason now needs Jessica more than her. In a bizarre gesture of self-immolation she takes her clothes, her perfumes and her aids to beauty down to the beach and burns them: 'No more competition,' she cries. By implication, of course, David's failure is that he is still competing while acknowledging the futility of competition.

The tragedy he provokes—Sally shoots Jason, but any one of the four might equally well have been the victim—leaves David alone again in the darkness of 'industrial valley', cherishing his

'The King of Marvin Gardens': Ellen Burstyn





'Les Noces Rouges': Stéphane Audran, Michel Piccoli

freedom, pondering his responsibility, personifying the bankruptcy of endeavour. Ambition and nostalgia, poetry and pragmatism, reality and fantasy, have all proved one in the bitter, disillusioning, impossible pursuit of happiness. Like Prospero's masque, the American dream fades into insubstantiality:

And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous
palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. . .

There hasn't been a more enveloping, more desolating—or for that matter funnier—put down of America in years.

TOM MILNE

Les Noces Rouges

If Chabrol is to be believed, *Les Noces Rouges* (Connoisseur) is the last film of his Balzacian *comédie humaine* of French society in the middle twentieth century. In this new film, written by Chabrol without the active help of his usual scenarist Paul Gégauff, the bourgeoisie are less charming, less discreet, less intelligent, and far more corrupt than Chabrol has ever before shown them. It was exactly this, no doubt, that caused the French censor to withhold public screenings of the film for over a month. The official reason was that the film might influence the decisions of the jurors in the trial of 'les amants diaboliques de Bourgneuf' then in progress.

It became clear, however, from almost weekly statements by Chabrol, and finally from the film itself after its release, that it was less the verdict of the court which worried the government than the verdict of the voters in the already doubtful April elections. The shape of Chabrol's plot is a classic triangle-murder, owing as much to the tradition of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* as to press stories about the similar murders in Bourgneuf. One wonders if the censor would have objected in the same way had Chabrol remained faithful to the Bourgneuf affair, setting his tale in a lower social milieu and limiting his plot to an *amour fou*, instead of dealing with political corruption in high government places.

The characters and story, of course, no matter what their ultimate source, are pure Chabrol.

His tone and manner are the aciform irony we have come to expect, tempered in (can it be said once again?) the hell of a Langian trap and the revelational—if not redemptive—Hitchcockian confessional. Paul, the mayor of Valençay, a member of the majority party, sexually impotent, deeply vulgar and stupid, although not without a certain political cunning, married Lucienne some years ago, in spite of (or, considering his impotence, because of) her having had an illegitimate daughter. Although Lucienne acts the role of the perfect political wife, listening with seemingly rapt attention to her husband's hopelessly pompous speeches at school theatricals, she and her daughter are 'accomplices' in a constant game of mocking Paul behind his back, joining in laughter at his ludicrous sleeping positions and sonorous snoring.

Paul has a scheme by which he will buy seemingly valueless public land, donate part of it to the town for a park, and use the rest to build cheap housing for the workers who will soon arrive to man a new plastics factory. He needs a partner above any suspicion of political corruption and chooses Pierre, a man above reproach and slightly to the left politically. He begins his seduction of Pierre by asking him to stand for the office of deputy mayor.

Pierre is also married, to Clotilde, a sexually repressed neurotic who believes herself to be a near-invalid, and whose major contribution to her husband's marital happiness is to stock the refrigerator with cold chicken. It is not long, of course, before Pierre and Lucienne are 'les amants fous'. We are not, however, being offered a romantic solution to provincial frustrations. Just as Chabrol parodied the romantic cinema with his swooping tracking shots in the lovers' walk through the poppy fields as long ago as *La Double Tour*, in *Les Noces Rouges* he so controls the love scenes of Pierre and Lucienne that they are as hilarious as they are erotic.

Never having the time for tenderness in their 'stolen hours', the lovers grasp at each other, tearing at each other's clothes, and coupling like cats in extreme heat. This is grand passion reduced to its most banal level. They are made to crawl about in the bushes to retrieve their clothing while it is almost hooked on the lines of passing children out fishing. There is no grace, no style, no charm allowed them; they are merely stupid and vulgar. It is, then, no small achievement that Chabrol, via Stéphane Audran and Michel Piccoli, transforms these

characters into people about whom one can care even as one laughs at them. Audran plays her role with the twitching febrility and tempered steel tension of an anxious lioness. Piccoli's innate sensitivity as an actor works well against the vulgarity of his character, even as he pours wine into his soup to suck the mixture noisily from chunks of soppy bread, so that there are constantly tiny explosions of delight in his performance.

Unable to stand any longer the confines of his frigid marriage, Pierre poisons his wife. While the official reason for Clotilde's death is an accidental overdose, the sensation-hungry townsfolk whisper 'suicide, suicide'. Even Lucienne believes it to be suicide until, in one of the film's most disturbing scenes, Pierre confesses the truth. Until this moment we have been led to believe, by Chabrol's limiting placement of the camera, that Clotilde slept alone in a small, over-decorated room. It is only during the confession that we are shown the entire room, and suddenly realise that they are making love with an added excitement a few feet from Clotilde's deathbed.

Soon Paul, after a quiet dinner, makes his land scheme proposal to Pierre. While Pierre is revolted, he accepts with some reluctance, realising that Paul will have to spend more time in Paris, leaving Lucienne free for himself. Paul, however, perceives that an affair is going on, and instead of going to Paris, waits to trap Lucienne. Far from being displeased, Paul is delighted: he can now trade his wife for Pierre's full co-operation in the swindle. The trapped couple decide to murder the mayor in a staged automobile accident—which is directed by Chabrol in a manner reminiscent of a similar murder in Tay Garnett's version of Cain's *Postman*. Again linking death to the excitement of their passion, Chabrol places the lovers against a background of flames from the burning car for a kiss, with strings of saliva stretched between their mouths, flashing in the light like lines of the web into which they have fallen.

Although to the police there is something patently false about Lucienne's story, they are forced to accept her version of the 'accident'. A phone call from 'M. le Président' orders that there be no further investigation. A scandal is to be avoided at all costs, for what could emerge might be more than a wife's murder of her husband. Thus Chabrol ties political and personal corruption to the highest levels of power.

Ironically, it is this fear of scandal which brings about the final arrest of Pierre and Lucienne. The daughter has suspected that she and her mother are no longer accomplices, that her mother has concealed the affair with Pierre from her. And she chooses to become her stepfather's daughter, a part of the closed and repressive society which has given her legitimacy. She forces a partial confession from her mother—infidelity, not murder—and writes a letter implicating Pierre in the mayor's death. The police cannot ignore it and investigate. Already miserable because of the separation forced on them to divert suspicion, Pierre and Lucienne confess with relief; indeed, Pierre adds gratuitously that he also murdered his wife. Far from being redeemed by their confession, however, they are to be the victims of a further irony. When a detective asks Pierre why he and Lucienne didn't simply leave together to begin anew, without the necessity of accepting hypocrisy, corruption and murder as alternatives, the bewildered response is 'Leave? But we never even dreamed of that!'

In *Les Noces Rouges*, as in every film Chabrol has made in the series, which can be extended back as far as *Le Beau Serge*, there is a Paul. This time, however, there is no Hélène or Charles. Chabrol has said that Hélène is partially a creature of myth, and that 'Charles will never kill Paul.' Charles was the character who was incapable of final corruption, who was

often an idealist and dreamer. In *Les Noces Rouges*, as in the underrated *Doctor Popaul*, it would seem that Paul can be killed by a changed Charles character. The dreamers and the dream, as well as the Hélène of romantic myth, are no more. So it is that Chabrol ends his rich series of bourgeois melodramas. A new sort of system? A new basis for human relationships? Why, they never even dreamed of that!

DAVID L. OVERBEY

A Gorgeous Bird Like Me

Rather like the sudden revelation of a maliciously grinning face, finally visible through the detail of a drawing, François Truffaut's *A Gorgeous Bird Like Me* (Gala) ends on an unexpectedly sardonic joke. Earnest sociologist Stanislas Prévigne, after fruitlessly trying to get at the 'truth' of the poor little jail-bird Camille Bliss, is innocently incarcerated in her place while his lovelorn but faithful secretary types devotedly on and Camille goes scotfree. The ending hints at a pattern to the contest of styles between Stanislas and Camille—parodies of reason and instinct, with the bias towards an anti-intellectual buffoonery in the cardboard caricature of the sociologist. But the rest of the film is too busy with repetitive and faintly parasitic gags to make much of the competition, and the pattern is meaninglessly scrambled by some casual dislocations. There is the gap between the 'gorgeous bird' Camille is made out to be and the charmless performance of a Bernadette Lafont sadly lacking in plumage; and the distance between the scapegrace frivolity of Camille's life of crime and the sententiousness of the lesson about life and criminality which she draws for the haplessly imprisoned Stanislas, telling him that there are certain things one only learns in prison and 'now you know, just like me.'

In place of the moral righteousness of the heroine of *The Bride Wore Black*, *A Gorgeous Bird Like Me* celebrates Camille's single-minded pursuit of a good time. Where Stanislas fails to see the wood for the trees, his own confusion of motives for the case history he finds in Camille, the film takes Camille's adventures at a joyous gallop which asserts the whimsical 'truth' of her own openly self-centred scheming. Early in her career, the camera tracks gracefully across the frontage of the Bliss home, briefly taking in—as if in a furiously animated cross-section—the confusion which Camille quickly spreads through her future husband's household while in pursuit of its treasure.

Similarly, her relish for the things of life and her talent for exploiting the moment seem to entitle her to the opportune twists of fate which speed her on her way. Not only the *pari de la fatalité* that is her own peculiarly idiosyncratic invention for disposing of the inconvenient, but such lucky escapes as the magical appearance in a provincial wasteland of the Colt Saloon—the answer to a starstruck country girl's dilemma in ditching her clod of a husband, Clovis—and later, the road accident which puts the same husband temporarily out of action after a jealous scene in the Saloon: the camera tracking with scarcely a pause for breath from the angry denunciations to the roadside where Clovis lies prostrate, surrounded by a crowd of bystanders who seem to have taken their places in some pre-determined tableau. Accidents happily range themselves round the heroine, much as they did in *The Bride Wore Black*, and Truffaut clearly relishes the way Camille triumphs, a somewhat different goddess, over all the bric-à-brac and ephemera which elsewhere creates such confusion in his characters' lives. In the comic context of *A Gorgeous Bird Like Me*, a good deal of the savour is lost simply because this *femme* comes over as much less *fatale* than may have been intended.

In appearance little more than an interim film, *A Gorgeous Bird Like Me* relates loosely to—and halfheartedly parodies—Truffaut's comedy of the capriciousness of life in the Doineau saga as well as the serious themes of *L'Enfant Sauvage* and *The Bride Wore Black*. Its references (including the name Bliss from *The Bride Wore Black*) reach back as far as *Shoot the Pianist*, with Camille stopping over to bathe for a while in the tawdry glamour of the Colt Saloon and expounding briefly on the life-enhancing qualities of show business ('I always respect people with big names. They know all about life') while sharing, in a less than enhancing relationship, the resident singer with his violently jealous wife. But *A Gorgeous Bird Like Me* fails to turn the collision of expectations to comic effect, and the trajectory of Camille's career becomes increasingly directionless as the eccentrics she encounters *en route* turn unfailingly into belaboured stereotypes, and the film huffs and puffs from one frenetic incident to the next. Sadly its mock-comic ballad of freedom and imprisonment cracks under the strain.

RICHARD COMBS

A Doll's House

Time and conservatism have combined over the decades to transform Ibsen's *Doll's House* from Victorian agit-prop to repertory classic. Adhering zealously to the first principles of naturalism and unquestioningly faithful to the 'fourth wall' theory, a stream of reverent directors (among them Patrick Garland, whose Broadway production provided the basis for his recent film with Claire Bloom) have made the play's title seem more like an allusion to the limitations of theatrical *mise-en-scène* than a metaphor for its heroine's anguish. Ibsen's Nora was a human bird in a gilded prison, a weary dancer turning in a fixed circle on a mechanical music-box to which her husband held the key. It is to Joseph Losey's credit that he has at once rendered unto Ibsen that which is Ibsen's and expanded the dramatist's doctrine of naturalism to meet the possibilities of a more naturalistic medium.

Where Garland and his adaptor, Christopher Hampton, meekly observed the laws of theatrical time and space, allowing their Nora only one brief, pre-credits sleigh-ride and a quick trip to

Torvald's studio-set attic, Losey and playwright David Mercer have together dared to reorganise the text to show the times and places of which Ibsen's characters could merely speak. The action of the play, confined to the Helmers' sitting-room, showed the accumulated tensions of seven years converging to a crisis over three days of Christmas festivity. Indeed, Ibsen's favourite theme and the one which binds Nora most tightly to the play's other characters—of the father's sins visited on the children and the present forever blighted by the need to expiate the past—was ill-served by the conventions within which he worked.

Losey and Mercer recognise no such constraints. Their *Doll's House* (British Lion) opens with Nora and her schoolfriend Kristine putting aside childish things with an orgy of cream cakes and a farewell visit to the village skating-pond: Nora thoughtlessly, rushing to the big town and a fiancé she admires, marrying for both love and money; Kristine reflectively, breaking her connection with Krogstad (who hovers like some sinister outcast at the tea-room door, as later he will lie in wait outside the Helmers' house) to save her impoverished family through a loveless marriage. Then, a new 'second act' shows Nora embarking on her first deceit, the trip to Italy to save Torvald's life and which he accepts only as a last indulgence before she settles down to her responsibilities as he sees them. Losey's 'third act' opens where Ibsen's play begins, with the year abroad now enshrined in a photograph on the sideboard.

Of all Torvald's patronising animal endearments, Mercer has retained only that of the 'little skylark', using it to create a thread of images more powerful than Ibsen's confused menagerie. From her first, characteristically unfinished, conversation with Kristine, Nora retreats with an apologetic 'I must fly'; and thereafter we watch the character seeking helplessly to spread her wings. Torvald admits to Dr. Rank that 'I rather like the way she crashes about.' And as the consequences of her one selfless act home in on Nora, Losey has her, no longer waiting passively to confide in every caller at the house, but rushing impetuously to a rendezvous with Krogstad at the fjords, to Kristine's sparsely furnished lodgings, to Rank's bachelor apartment, to the hilltop from which she furtively observes her children frolicking in the snow, but passing by the church which—in a disconcertingly held interior shot—is shown

'A Doll's House': Trevor Howard, Delphine Seyrig, Jane Fonda



to be empty alike of worshippers and comfort. Each time his Nora departs as hastily as she arrives, refusing to face the truth about herself, her marriage or the society in which she lives. Finally, it is Kristine, reunited with a Krogstad who hopes fervently that she will never live in fear of his judgment, who determines that 'Nora's unhappy secret must be revealed.'

Shot on location in Norway and, unlike Garland's film, peopled with a credible quantity of extras, Losey's 'foreign country' rings true: in part because of the several adjustments to the text (Rank now flirts with Nora but keeps his medical confidences for her husband), but also because of its immaculate casting. David Warner as a sour-tempered, latter-day Joe Lampton; Delphine Seyrig a gentle, wise-beyond-her-years Kristine; Trevor Howard a vulnerably sceptical Rank; and Edward Fox, brilliant as the intelligent and embittered Krogstad, trapped in a hypocritical society as he is in the glass partitions of the bank in which he works.

At the centre of the film is still the doll herself, Nora. But where Claire Bloom brought to the role a quality of desperate calculation, shedding her smiles and youthful prancing with an almost palpable relief, Jane Fonda leaves Torvald's house more credibly, a child-wife married too young and with her celebrated vitality still intact. The truthfulness of her interpretation may owe as much to life as to art, but there too Ibsen would have approved. As he declared in his famous speech to the Norwegian students some five years before writing *A Doll's House*: 'Nobody can picture poetically anything for which he himself has not to a certain degree and at least at times served as a model.'

JAN DAWSON

The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds

There is a marvellous scene somewhere in the middle of *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* (Fox-Rank) which catches exactly the style and tone of the whole film. Our heroine, Beatrice Hunsdorfer, has just had the latest of several frustrating or downright painful encounters with the world in general and men in particular. She drives off wildly into the night to cool off and perhaps sober up—we can never be quite sure how drunk she really is. Comes the dawn, she has

dumped the car by the side of the road and climbed some way up a bare, forlorn little hill. A passing police-car stops to investigate. A policeman of about her own age—which is already middle-aged—gingerly approaches. Is she, he wants to know, all right? She is, sort of—and then suddenly recognition dawns. Isn't he, and weren't they at school together, and did he ever marry what's-her-name? He is, and they were, and after all he did. Not that either of them can remember too certainly—you have the feeling that it might still be, despite the names shakily conjured forth, two quite different people they are talking about and think they remember. But what could be a nasty situation is turned to a rather amiable one. Still uncomfortable, but then most of life is that—uncomfortable, puzzling, and faintly embarrassing.

At least, that is what the film makes you feel; and it manages it without itself being uncomfortable or puzzling or even faintly embarrassing. And yet scene after scene of the play upon which it is based turns on acute embarrassment. The embarrassment of Beatrice's two daughters, called upon at school to explain away their mother, a fully fledged Stella Dallas of the Seventies. The embarrassment of the shame-faced younger woman who brings her aged mother to live and probably to die in Beatrice Hunsdorfer's dubious care. The embarrassment of practically every man who comes in contact with her, for whatever purpose. And the embarrassment of Beatrice herself, more than half aware of the spectacle she cannot help being, and too much of a mess to do anything about it. It sounds like a masochist's orgy, but through the combined ingenuities of Paul Newman, who directed it, Joanne Woodward, who plays Beatrice, and Alvin Sargent, who adapted the play to the screen, it is nothing of the sort.

The most important thing they do to tone down the distress is what they do in the scene described (like all the best scenes in the film, an invention of the adaptor's): they play down what you would expect to be the big scenes, and play up the incidentals, the little peripheral moments. Practically all of *Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* takes place on the margins, but here the rim really is the centre. Beatrice, who could be a monster, particularly of self-pity, is given in Joanne Woodward's performance a salt and asperity which makes us see how she was once and still could be a funny, attractive person; you can see why her children care for her even while they cringe.

All through the film there looms the prospect

of the obligatory episode in which a drunken and slatternly Beatrice will wreck her brighter daughter's big moment receiving a prize at school for her studies of the effect of gamma rays on man-in-the-moon marigolds. But when it comes Paul Newman's handling of it is masterly. It figures as the final gesture of an evening spent trying to return the vegetable old woman lodger whence she came and repay the world for its incomprehension; by this time nearly all passion is spent, and Beatrice herself realises the impossibility of getting through to anyone. So her big moment fizzles: she has her say, briefly, and is led away, just as though nothing had happened. For essentially nothing has happened. Who is she and what does she matter anyway—except, of course, to herself?

It is easy to labour the point. But as in *Rachel, Rachel*, the whole film is so much better than the sum of its parts; the subject, which could so easily be a depressing foray into sub-William Inge country, is handled with such constant refinement and unsentimental precision that, all unwillingly, one believes and remembers. Was there a Rachel, Rachel in every woman? Possibly not, but *Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* leaves us a little uneasily wondering if we do not perhaps contain an embryonic Beatrice Hunsdorfer struggling to get out. Once upon a time they called it human interest; contemporary cinema hardly has a word for it.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

'Tis Pity She's a Whore

The first thing you recognise in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (Miracle) is a series of images of extraordinary beauty and splendour. To begin with they seem like isolated images: the forest of fluttering white banners amid the dunes where Annabella and Giovanni, the brother and sister become lovers, first brood on their future and later Giovanni has his dark night of the soul against a chill winter sunset; the stance of Soranzo, the deceived husband, grimly supervising the dismemberment of Giovanni clad in a complex wooden brace that makes him look like a refugee from a Vorticist painting. It is perhaps significant, though, that the first two I pick are both quite mysterious and unexplained (if not, presumably, inexplicable) in realistic terms. Are all the banners for anything—to scare birds; part of some land reclamation scheme? Is the brace surgical, some kind of treatment for the stab wound in the shoulder Giovanni gave Soranzo, or is it a self-mortifying instrument of torture he has applied to himself even as he goes about executing his revenge?

We do not know, and for that matter we do not care. They go towards the creation of a disquieting world of semi-abstractions in which such extraordinary characters can fitly live and breathe. Taken one by one the images are dazzling, but the film is no aesthete's colouring book of pretty pictures—every picture helps to tell the story. The whole film is a tight net of visual references, recurrent images in the poetic as well as the literal sense. There is the Chinese-box birdcage into which Giovanni pursues Annabella, trying to get some sense out of her when she is in a teasing mood, whipping through door after door in close-up accompanied by the rustle and flap of tiny frightened wings, while we are left totally disoriented until the end of the scene, when the camera is pulled back to reveal the two characters' spatial relationship and how the setting is put together. Or there is the weird pale-wood maze of constantly changing perspectives in which Soranzo sues for Annabella's favours while Giovanni lurks just out of his sight, but held constantly in visual comparison by Annabella and ourselves.

In other words, from the moment Giovanni and Annabella enter their incestuous relationship they are caught in a labyrinth—one which, to an extent, they can negotiate but which

'Tis Pity She's a Whore'



finally dominates them and makes them the toy of external forces pulling every which way, like the raft on which the horses arrive towards the end, brought to where Soranzo wants it by a dozen or so ropes to all parts of the castle's harbour which somehow balance out and edge it to the quay. It is as though Patroni Griffi, having decided to jettison the smoky splendours of John Ford's muse, has replaced them with his own visual rhetoric to produce much the same result. Not that the verbal side of his film is by any means as dire as it has been represented—there is, after all, more than a touch of intellectual snobbery to objections just because the characters are made to talk colloquially rather than in the blank verse of Jacobean tragedy; and actually the only dodgy moments come when, just occasionally, a recognisable line of Ford pops up in the midst of fairly normal modern prose.

All the same, the words are no longer what Patroni Griffi's *'Tis Pity* is about. Most of the key scenes he manages with very few words of any kind, and his players, Charlotte Rampling, Oliver Tobias and Fabio Testi, are used more as hieroglyphs than as actors, even though Miss Rampling in particular looks considerably more like an actress of consequence than ever before. And even though it has been briskly shorn of a couple of intertwined subplots concerning two other candidates for Annabella's hand, the essential feeling of the play is kept intact. There are ideas, indeed, which work out so well as a way of reading the play that one would like to see them used in a stage production. In particular, the management of the notorious scene near the end in which Giovanni starts off the blood-letting by appearing at the family banquet with Annabella's heart skewered on his dagger.

This is led up to by what seems like an endless tracking shot of Giovanni staggering along a gallery passageway, so that we get habituated to the bloody sight, then a sharp swerve into the banquet hall through an anteroom lined with tiny wooden pyramids like spikes (a breath-catching visual shock, this). Once inside, however, Giovanni seems to be running out of steam. There are a few yelps, but his entry really falls rather flat. And understandably—even in Renaissance Italy, if someone came dashing in with a human heart wrapped in muslin probably the last thing you would suppose it to be is a human heart wrapped in muslin. And so Giovanni is finally left insisting lamely, 'It is her heart, really it is,' and the impetus for the cumulative horror of the slaughter comes, of course, from someone else; from the deceived husband who, even in a frenzy of vengefulness, at least continues to belong to the real world of life rather than the bleak abstraction inhabited by Giovanni and Annabella.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

Don't Look Now

Oddly, or perhaps not so oddly when one remembers *The Birds*, Nicolas Roeg's third film is adapted from a short story by Daphne du Maurier. "Don't look now," John said to his wife, "but there are a couple of old girls two tables away who are trying to hypnotise me." From this deliberately casual opening the story develops into a pleasantly ghostly mystery involving telepathic powers. The young couple are in Venice recovering from the trauma of their little girl's death; one of the old girls is psychic and tries to pass on a warning of danger from the dead child; and a series of repudiations and mistaken assumptions leads around in a circle to the dimly foreseen disaster.

Following the outlines of the story exactly with an admirable script by Allan Scott and Chris Bryant, but translating it into his own imagistic style, Roeg has changed its meaning entirely. It is no longer about telepathy. Or



'Don't Look Now': Julie Christie, Hilary Mason, Clelia Matania

perhaps it is. But we are back again, as with *Performance* and to a lesser extent *Walkabout*, in a Borgesian world where the natural and the supernatural coexist, and where life is a dark labyrinth through which man is impelled to run towards an encounter with his 'demon'. Don't look now, Roeg might be saying, but every time you hear or see something, your mind is drawing connections and conclusions from depths of which you know nothing.

Don't Look Now (British Lion) begins with the traumatic death by drowning of the little girl. Outside, two children are happily playing, a boy riding a bicycle on the grass, a little girl in a red mackintosh tossing her ball ominously close to a pond. Inside, John (Donald Sutherland) is looking at slides of stained glass windows through a projector, while Laura (Julie Christie) is sitting by the fire with a book. The images, either juxtaposed or echoing more remotely, create surging associations—the red stained glass, the red mackintosh; John throwing a packet of cigarettes, the little girl throwing her ball; a glass knocked over, a stain spreading on one of the slides—until, as though impelled by their implications, John rushes outside, too late.

At first, with its metronome precision, this sequence seems almost too calculated. But as the film develops one realises that it assembles all the images which are later to grow like figments of the imagination when the bereaved couple reach Venice. Red as a colour associated not only with death but with love and sex; the church as an ambivalent source of spiritual balance; the spreading stain like a forensic clue, linking with the Venetian police's frantic hunt for a maniac killer; the slide projector and screen, filling our screen with a reminder of the magic powers of the 'dream factory'. Just as the spilled liquid is magnified into monstrous significance, so with the series of essentially banal happenings in Venice: a city slowly dying in which, to borrow from Donne, 'I run to Death and Death meets me as fast.'

Even the last shot of this opening sequence, a cut from Laura screaming (against a splash of red flowers) to a power drill roaring as John supervises the restoration of a church in Venice, is a pointer to the secret workings under the surface. A familiar intellectual-mundane opposition is established between husband and wife: he ponders the abstract beauty of the art works he is to restore, while she leafs through an encyclopaedia in the hope of finding some

answer to one of those teasingly impossible childish questions ('If the world's round, why is a frozen pond flat?'). Yet his grief explodes in a terrible animal howl, while her scream is cut off almost as soon as it begins, controlled as though it were controllable. Then in Venice he is calm and protective, while she is nervous, obviously still scarred; but something—his sense of guilt, perhaps, or his concern for her, or his imperfect rationalisation of his feelings—is burrowing away within him like that power drill.

There are two key sequences, both extraordinary. One is the Hitchcockian suspense of the night walk when John and Laura get lost in a sinister warren of Venetian back streets, and are startled by a mysterious cry, a man closing a shutter, a light extinguished to bring utter blackness. Momentarily separated from Laura and seized by panic, John then experiences what is virtually an echo of the same happenings, with the addition of a half-seen, half-sensed flash of red which might be the dead child's mackintosh. The whole episode could have—and in a sense has—a perfectly rational explanation, but it is also a superb evocation of the mind's powers of unreason in orchestrating fear, and it begins to spread its wings over the film.

The second, actually immediately preceding the first, is the exquisite time-slip when Roeg suddenly begins to counterpoint a scene of John and Laura making love with images of them dressing. Not only does this have the unsettling effect of telescoping time (Death runs to them, indeed, as they emerge from the hotel, fully dressed, to embark on the Hitchcock walk), it also transfers all eroticism from the nude embraces to the ritual of dressing (suggesting that the true sensuality for them now may be in that night journey towards fear or hope with the weird sisters). Furthermore, it also makes one begin to wonder about the sequence of events, whether the love-making came now or on some earlier occasion. Logically, it must have happened now, but the doubt creates a climate of relativity in which it is also perfectly logical for a man to imagine (or foresee) his own death. The whole film, as one eventually discovers, is predicated upon this subtle two-way traffic in time with its mosaic of associations, recollections and intimations which starts with the first two images, seen behind the credit titles: of rain beating down on the surface of the pond where the child will

die, and of water pouring down an opaque glass surface which later proves to be a shower-door in a Venetian hotel.

Roeg does not deal in symbols, and these two images are what they are, and not metaphors for tears, wombs or mother-love. Everything that comes under his camera's scrutiny has its own existence, like the prehistoric creatures in *Walkabout* which mean one thing to the aborigine boy, another to the lost white children, and something else again to the audience watching the film. Here, Roeg is scrupulously careful to avoid built-in meanings or casual assumptions of significance. The sound of breaking glass which so ominously heralds the drowning (the boy rides over a stray pane on his bicycle) and later recurs equally shatteringly as glass is broken at two other moments of disaster, remains an association of crisis rather than a symbol or even a portent. The two old sisters, undoubtedly telepathic in the original story, may simply be confidence tricksters (the evidence of the red mackintosh, with which they convince Laura they 'saw' her child, could have been gleaned from a newspaper report of the tragedy; and Roeg inserts an unexplained shot of the pair laughing triumphantly after they have hooked Laura with their 'vision'). Venice itself is not used as a pathetic fallacy, but merely as an off-season resort desolate because it is empty, closed up, hostile to intruders.

There is, finally, the welter of churches, crucifixes, candles, bishops, priests and religious art objects, which will doubtless cause the film to be annexed to Catholicism. Its drive, I think, is in exactly the opposite direction. 'Churches belong to God, but He doesn't seem to care about them,' says John, contemplating the ruin which only exists for him in so far as it is his job, and his aesthetic pleasure, to restore it. Laura does enter a church at one point to essay a prayer, not because she believes, but because she believes something has happened which she can't encompass intellectually. This, clinging desperately to his pride as a man of reason, John refuses to accept; and it is this that drives him to his destruction. Like Turner in *Performance* and the aborigine in *Walkabout*, though all three start from very different points of the compass, he finds himself courting his demon, his *alter ego*, or perhaps simply his death. The three films form an astonishing trilogy querying the whole conception of 'civilisation'. They also put Nicolas Roeg right up at the top as a film-maker.

TOM MILNE

State of Siege

Costa-Gavras moves with the times. With the totalitarian right and left neatly sewn up in *Z* and *The Confession*, he has now left Europe for Latin America—where the action is—and come up with an indictment of the whole ugly apparatus of American intervention. *State of Siege* (Hemdale) was shot in Allende's Chile and is set in some unnamed South American country; in fact Uruguay, as a Montevideo registration plate immediately announces. The background, as before, is factual. A highly organised group of urban guerrillas kidnap three foreign officials, hostages for the release of political prisoners—who, like the Tupamaros themselves, officially don't exist. For the film's purposes two of the kidnapped men are unimportant; the spotlight is turned on Dan A. Mitriane, or Philip Michael Santore as he is called here, 'communications expert' for the Washington-based Agency for International Development.

Almost the first fact revealed to us is that Santore is executed by his kidnappers, suggesting that Costa-Gavras was anxious to forestall objections (valid for both *Z* and *The Confession*) that the political content is subordinate to the mechanics of suspense. Another move in this

direction is the casting of Yves Montand, victim of both previous films, as the villain of the piece. In the event both these devices are little more than momentarily unsettling ploys, since it is clear from the beginning that what interests Costa-Gavras is the process of politics, in this case the machinery of neo-colonialism masquerading as an Alliance for Progress. The opening has the familiar Costa-Gavras signature. A misty dawn, police roadblocks, people frisked in the street on their way to work, lights blinking on a wall-map at police headquarters as the radio picks up patrol car reports. The cutting here is staccato, the edges of a jigsaw puzzle quickly slotted together. The picture in the middle is an extended flashback, built round Santore's imprisonment and interrogation by his hooded kidnappers. The pace slows to accommodate the assiduously documented reality behind this traffic adviser's façade. Santore is confronted with a dossier on himself, revealing him as an expert in counter-insurgency methods, including torture, which under his tutelage his host country's police force is now vigorously applying. Visual illustration—of the International Police Academy in Washington, of a desert training camp for specialists in explosives—confounds his denials.

Parallel with these unsavoury revelations are the attempts of the press (whose mouthpiece is a wily old hand represented, curiously, by O. E. Hasse) and parliamentary opposition to discover for themselves what Santore's interrogation has already confirmed. The evidence, as it has to be after Guatemala and the ITT in Chile, is damning. Direct intervention has been replaced by covert infiltration disguised as economic and 'technical' aid.

Which is hardly a revelation. And indeed the politics of *State of Siege* are considerably less ambivalent than those of *The Confession*: America today is a somewhat more reachable target than Stalinist purges in the Fifties. As with *The Confession*, though, the particular focus tends to blur the general issue, even if one grants that this individual case is exemplary (and that's a dubious concession, since the particular Uruguayan situation has its particular reasons). There is no perspective to this kidnapping beyond the vague ideological dialogue between Santore and his interrogators. Both sides are intelligent, disciplined and utterly committed, but we are told nothing of the general political and economic background to this particular event. The script—by Franco Solinas, who also wrote *Salvatore Giuliano*, *Battle of Algiers* and *Queimada!*—occasionally suggests a tentative nod in this direction, only to be checked by the persistent conflict between the film's form and what is missing in the content. Characteristically, Costa-Gavras is unable to resist the opportunist tricks of the skilled exponent of political melodrama. A taxi driver, about to have his car expropriated by the Tupamaros, tells them he's getting used to the experience—and watch the brakes. The straw poll among group members to decide Santore's fate seems briefly threatened by a policeman, until he too is revealed as a revolutionary and we can breathe again. Legitimate tactics for a political thriller, but *State of Siege* was supposed to be more than that.

DAVID WILSON

Charley Varrick

The opening sequence of Don Siegel's new film evokes the beginning of the working day in a rural town in New Mexico: misty morning-scapes with cattle grazing, men mowing lawns, a veteran raising the flag, kids playing. The down-home placidity is abruptly, inexplicably ruptured by the interjection of the main title, whose letters are seen through a roar of flame. Siegel's films have always been built on precise correspondences between character or behaviour

and environment, like most good genre movies, his sensibility in this respect lies somewhere between Hawks' virile functionalism and Losey's seductive aestheticism. Here, though, is an opening that (at least figuratively) suggests a clash between character and setting; and, true to its promise, it heralds Siegel's most playfully serious rearrangement of a genre formula since *Coogan's Bluff*. Charley Varrick (CIC) is his contribution to the Mafia cycle, set in the fields, small-change businesses and trailer parks of American hicksville.

Charley Varrick, 'Last of the Independents', works as a crop-duster but supplements his income by raiding small-town banks with his wife Nadine and two assistants. One job goes very wrong; it costs the lives of Nadine and one of the men, and nets over \$750,000, money that Charley realises must be an undeclared out-of-state drop for the Mafia. He decides to buy his peace by returning the money, but his remaining assistant Harman still wants in. And so Boyle, bank president and front man for the Organisation, and his hired heavy Molly (Joe Don Baker) arrive to conduct their own investigation alongside that of the police. Charley, however, manages to remain one step ahead right up to the final confrontation which, after demolishing the usual Siegel hardware (this time, two cars and a small plane), resolves into a neat battle of wits.

The film, like Walter Matthau's lead performance, becomes more good-naturedly humorous as it proceeds, and marks something of a return for Siegel to the liberal softie he used to be. At its heart is a curious individualist ethos which consistently defines the characters in terms of their sexual foibles as people whose lives are governed pragmatically by contradictory private moralities. Charley is compared with his prime adversary Molly throughout; Charley wins through because he's quicker-witted, his love life is straighter and he has a sense of humour. The subsidiary characters are strongly drawn and equally individual: the dotty old lady who is Charley's neighbour in the trailer-park, subsisting on a diet of rape fantasies and obscene phone calls; the timid bank manager who commits suicide when advised that he's liable to torture and castration at the hands of the Mafia; the lady passport forger who needs only a slap in the face to tumble gratefully into bed with Molly. One short scene, in which Molly limbers up for the big job by repossessing a car from a family of helpless, terrorised blacks, gives the action a fleeting social dimension.

Siegel creates fascinating tensions between the understated violence and urgency of his plot and the pace of small-town life and mentalities. The anomalous setting yields plum after plum: the shiny plastic brothel with its 'Love, Peace, Joy' dartboard and its dollar-bill door-mats, where Molly distastefully settles for his first night in town with a curt 'I don't sleep with whores, at least not knowingly'; the tumbledown airstrip next to a huge car dump. Even the veiled threats are rural: 'I'd like to change places with a cow,' purrs Boyle to his terrified underling. 'The worst thing that could happen would be a short circuit in the electric milker.' Scene after scene is shot with the characters in foreground shadow against brilliantly sunlit fields and streets. But the decisive and exceptionally satisfying ending bridges the gap between action and setting and locks the film into a focus that is distinctively Siegel's. The final shot repeats the 'inexplicable' main title, this time locating it sequentially in the action (it is revealed as the monogram on the back of Charley's overalls, burning as he tosses them on to the wreck of a booby-trapped car). And suddenly all the city-style noise and aggravation are seen for what they have been: a spot of bother out of phase with the low-key criminality of life on the border, burning itself out in the morning light. Siegel, like his independent hero, understands it better than anybody.

TONY RAYNS

BOOK REVIEWS

THE BRITISH FILM CATALOGUE 1895-1970

By Denis Gifford

DAVID & CHARLES, £18.50

Denis Gifford's awesome tome is a remarkable achievement—over 1,000 pages, more than 14,000 films listed, with credits and synopses—a monumental tribute to the industry and self-discipline of its author and the courage of his publishers (those enterprising and improbable whizz-kids David & Charles of Newton Abbot, who stopped a rot of 24 consecutive rejection slips). It is also, without question, an invaluable, not to say unique, research tool, and a timely one, now that early British cinema has suddenly, in buffish circles, become fashionable and ripe for reappraisal; and any would-be purchaser about to balk at the eyebrow-raising price should note that it works out at not much more than £1 for each year Gifford spent on his unenviable task.

However, £18.50 is not mere pocket-money, and at the risk of appearing like the motoring correspondent who, desperate to find a flaw in the car he's testing, picks on the design of the ashtrays, one feels obliged to point out a few shortcomings—more for the benefit of the researcher-in-depth than for the browser or random title-hunter. This is not to belittle the Herculean nature of Denis Gifford's self-appointed labours, nor to ignore the fact that once you start a line of research like the one he has chosen, painting the Forth Bridge becomes a spare-time hobby by comparison. What follows should be taken, not as fault-finding for the sake of it, but as well-meant notes for a second edition (David & Charles willing).

The preface, first of all, starts with a dangerous superlative. 'This,' it claims, 'is the first complete catalogue of every British film produced for public entertainment since the invention of cinematography.' Not so. Where, for instance, among the myriad Fred Evans comedies of the early 'teens (the irrepressible 'Pimple' was his favourite film characterisation) is *Puny Peter*, who anticipated Popeye by 20-odd years ('COMEDY Puny Peter eats strength-giving Standard Bread and creates havoc around town,' to copy Denis Gifford's synoptic style)? Where is *Motor Pirates*, a hilariously primitive Alpha comedy of 1906 in which a Heath-Robinson armoured car terrorises the Hertfordshire countryside pursued by bobbies

(economy measures included having the same car double as police wagon and private motorist's vehicle—they're in different scenes but have the same number)? Is it the same as *The Motor Highwayman* or R. W. Paul's *The Motor Hooligans*, both mentioned by Gifford? Unlikely, and it certainly isn't *The Motor Bandits*, which appeared six years later. And where is *Tilly and the Fly Papers*, one of a popular Hepworth series about the adventures of a tomboy played by Alma Taylor (Gifford does mention 21 others)?

It's possible, of course, that these esoteric omissions—which, to be fair, were only unearthed in recent months in two old collections donated to the National Film Archive—do appear in Gifford's book disguised under alternative titles (plagiarism and title-changing were rife in the early days), but if so, this highlights the catalogue's main fault—lack of cross-indexing. The entries—complete with cast, characters, basic credits (but not for photographers, alas), subject categories and synopses—are listed chronologically according to year and month of production, and indexed alphabetically. But (and one recognises that a second volume would be required to house them) there are no cross-indices of directors, principal actors, series or recurring characters, which a researcher investigating particular aspects of cinema would find so valuable.

It is a pity, too, that Gifford has chosen to omit all 'non-entertainment' documentaries, which is effectively to exclude the British cinema's main source of reputation and to imply that (e.g.) *Song of Ceylon* and *Night Mail* are not entertaining. However, as he says, 'There are more than enough of these to fill a companion volume, and perhaps one day they will.'

As for Gifford's synopses, one is tempted to echo the movie mogul who, having read through the Hollywood telephone directory, mistaking it for a script, opined that it had a great cast but was a bit short on plot. For the most part, they are as adequate as one short sentence will allow, and one can detect a hint of mockery in some of them. But it is impossible not to be derisive at such entries as (for Peter Hall's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) 'FANTASY Athens, period. Lovers' lives complicated by fairies,' or (for *The Dance of Death*) 'DRAMA Sweden. Sick captain ruins his wife's cousin, but their children fall in love,' which is

missing the point to say the least. What's wrong with 'Adaptation of the Shakespeare/Strindberg play'?

But these criticisms are, one admits, the carplings of a demanding user. There is simply nothing quite like Denis Gifford's book, and anyone brave enough to research the British cinema in any depth will find it a satisfying and necessary companion.

CLYDE JEAVONS

UNHOLY FOOLS

By Penelope Gilliatt

SECKER AND WARBURG, £4.00

Pauline Kael, Penelope Gilliatt's fellow shift-worker on the *New Yorker* film column, more or less started the present growth industry in reprinted movie criticism and has now established a three-volume lead. Mrs. Gilliatt, however, may yet catch up. Her *Unholy Fools* is a stylish 360 pages, far more elegantly produced (the last Kael collection literally came to pieces in my hands) and taking in theatre reviews, and even in a brief, engaging aside the 'William' children's books, as well as films. Miss Kael is still a street ahead on analysis and vituperation; but the Gilliatt volume is in any case perhaps more celebratory than strictly critical.

It's subtitled 'Wits, Comics, Disturbers of the Peace', a loose kind of definition which allows Mrs. Gilliatt to reprint mainly her pieces on comedy as seen and practised in the last decade, but also to include reviews of 2001, *A Report on the Party and the Guests*, Bergman's *A Passion* and other works in the peace-disturbing category. More elaborate sub-headings—'Cogitators' (Keaton, of course, but also Judy Holliday), 'Last-Ditch Wits' (Godard, Pinter), 'Scamps', 'Disrupters' etc.—provide the kind of groupings that possibly attract editors rather than readers, but leave the writer free to play the field.

Like most of us, Mrs. Gilliatt is at her best when her sympathies are most unequivocally engaged. A long piece about Renoir turns no very new ground—Renoir, by the time she met him, had probably said it all to all the countless interviewers. But the feelings of respect, exhilaration, almost childish affection and trust inescapable in even a brief encounter with him are the strengths of the article: it genuinely glows. Likewise with Keaton, who seems to have climbed a bookcase when she came to call—not to escape, but to demonstrate the crafts of 'the poetic human airship'. And she is excellent on Harry Langdon, whose primness strikes her as like that of 'a small girl with high hopes of one day being eight.' 'Maybe inflexibility, automatism, abstractedness and unsociability are great staples of funniness,' she notes. (Why maybe?) 'Langdon's films sometimes have them all.'

Elsewhere, in a review of a *Carry On* done, if I remember rightly, for her *Observer* column,

she resolutely argues the case for the bad joke. 'Most of the English-speaking world... has always accepted without any trouble that it is quite possible for a feeble joke to be that much funnier than a good one.' Nursery jokes still come high on her own list of amusements. And although Mrs. Gilliatt can write as exactly as James Agee about the precision and detail of the comedian's assorted arts, she has managed to enjoy some jokes of a distinctly feeble order. *Putney Swope*, for instance, gets a rather kindly notice; so do the Peter Sellers comedy *Only Two Can Play*, Clive Donner's *Luv* and the film version of *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*—all works, I would have thought, which parted company with their initial promise somewhere around the end of the first reel. So much writing about comedy comes down in the end to the simple assertion: I find it funny. And by quoting undeniably amusing lines, detached from the context of soggy incoherence, sheer chaos or entwining cliché in which one may actually experience them on the screen, Mrs. Gilliatt can fondly decorate the occasional goose as a swan.

The collection, however, is never stingy or mean-spirited. Like Tynan in his *Observer* days, Mrs. Gilliatt responds very positively to performances and performers, the appeal of personality in action. The critical battlegrounds of the 1960s are not her territory; she prefers a mixture of swift statement and detailed description to analytical argument. She's a performer herself; and what she deploys in her column is the kind of concentrated vitality she admires on the screen.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

THE FRED ASTAIRE AND GINGER ROGERS BOOK

By Arlene Croce

W. H. ALLEN, £4.00

Arlene Croce's exploration of the myth and reality of Astaire-Rogers begins beautifully. 'About four minutes into the movie *Shall We Dance*, Fred Astaire shows Edward Everett Horton a flip book of Ginger Rogers dancing and says, "I haven't even met her, but I'd kinda like to marry her," which is exactly what a movie audience of 1937 would have expected him to say. He's not just a man who has fallen in love with a picture of a girl, he's a man who has fallen in love with a girl who dances like that. From that moment on, the audience waits for them to dance together, knowing that Fred's feeling for Ginger can't be expressed in conventional love scenes—that until he dances with her he hasn't possessed her.'

Miraculously, the book continues on the same level. Of course one bristles now and then. Noting how in the Astaire-Rogers films dancing 'was transformed into a vehicle of serious emotion between a man and a woman,' Miss Croce snaps the door firmly shut: 'It

never happened in movies again.' What, never? Not even when Astaire melted the icy Charisse into 'All of You' in *Silk Stockings*, or while they were 'Dancing in the Dark' in *The Band Wagon*?

Well, tastes differ, and just about the only quarrel to be made with this book is that in dealing with Astaire-Rogers, Miss Croce finds it convenient to underrate Astaire without Rogers, as well as everything without Astaire-Rogers. *Singin' in the Rain*, she can't help but admit, is wonderful, but—"the fun of it hasn't much to do with dancing." I should have thought, on the contrary, that the fun of it has a great deal to do with the dancing in the title number, 'Moses Supposes' and 'Good Morning', to mention only a few.

Similarly, the so-called 'dark days' in Astaire's career, between the end of his partnership with Rogers and his revival with *Easter Parade*, did after all contain two splendid films in *You Were Never Lovelier* and *Yolanda and the Thief* (the latter is a much better film than Miss Croce's 'disaster' will allow), while the others are by no means all dross. Oddly, even *A Damsel in Distress*, the delightful film Astaire made with Joan Fontaine (she, admittedly, less delightful from a dance point of view than any of his subsequent partners) when Ginger Rogers departed for the first interruption to their series, is given rather grudging treatment.

For the rest, no complaints. Here are the nine Astaire-Rogers

films from *Flying Down to Rio* to *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*, plus *The Barkleys of Broadway*, fully described one by one, with devotion though by no means always with adulation, and with the dances analysed in a vocabulary which is wider and more exact than the average film critic can command (the author is also a dance critic). Background information galore, too, as well as full credits: the genesis of the films, the songs that were discarded or never materialised, the passages that were cut, the way Astaire worked as a choreographer, the backstage problems and rationalisations, and useful biographical sketches for names familiar from the credits but about whom information is sometimes hard to come by, like Van Nest Polglase, Dwight Taylor, Allan Scott, Hermes Pan, or the rather less familiar Hal Borne.

A record both useful and irresistible, in other words, for anyone with £4.00 to splash on a rather small book, handsomely illustrated with many unfamiliar stills but not particularly well laid-out. For this slight blemish the tiny still printed at the top of each page (flip the pages front-to-back or back-to-front and you get a few seconds of Astaire and Rogers in motion from two of their dances) is mainly responsible. It is a pleasant conceit, but the paper is too thin for it to work properly, and the awkward presence of these postage-stamp stills on the page does cut into the layout.

TOM MILNE

Letters

Tango and the Press

SIR,—Guy Phelps (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1973) protests too much. It may be that the reaction to *Last Tango in Paris* presented 'a classic study of the press at work,' but it didn't present a typical study. That is, there may be the occasional fuss about the content of films, but *Last Tango* was unusual in being explicitly sexual in content and in showing a world famous star apparently copulating.

Clearly the film went further than previous films intended for distribution on the major circuits. Clearly it was a matter of public interest. Mr. Phelps appears to be arguing that only film critics should be allowed to comment: I doubt whether he could convince the news editor of the *Daily Mail* that asking five reasonably sophisticated female reporters to describe their reactions to the film was a bad idea. Film critics may be favoured with a measure of hard porn against which to judge *Last Tango*: the public, by and large, isn't.

In the event, the five girls were rather fairer to the film than the *Daily Mail's* film critic. But if Guy Phelps is to give a balanced view of the press reaction, he ought to make a fair selection of critical comment as well, and there were several—notably Ian Christie of the *Daily Express*—who were responsible and balanced.

Incidentally, the first press report on *Last Tango* was not the *Sunday Mirror's* of December 17th, 1972, but the *Guardian's* of November 20th. Richard Roud saw the film at the New York Film Festival. He commented first, that it was 'a film about sexuality that is both intelligent and moving,' and secondly, he foresaw problems: 'It is certainly the best possible test for a censor: everyone here agreed that the film is not pornographic. On the other hand, it is graphic and explicit... *Last Tango* is manifestly too important a film to be put on the shelf. Meanwhile, the fur is going to fly.'

Does Mr. Phelps seriously suppose that *Last Tango* was not of more than specialist interest and that the popular press invented the story?

Yours faithfully,
MICHAEL MCNAY
Arts Page Editor

The Guardian,
London, W.C.1.

SIR,—An error has been pointed out in my article 'Censorship and the Press' (SIGHT AND SOUND,

Summer 1973) which should be corrected. *The Devils* has been banned (understandably perhaps) in Ireland as well as Greece, Spain and Portugal. It should also be made clear that *Straw Dogs* was passed as suitable for children in America only if they are accompanied by an adult. It is interesting to note that Peckinpah's latest film *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* was rated R in America (comparable to a British AA). In this country it had to be cut for an X, although press stories of a dispute between the Board of Censors and MGM, the distributors, can be discounted as a further case of sensationalism.

Finally it might be noted that at the time of writing (August), *Last Tango in Paris* has been banned by a dozen local authorities, while a good many more have expressed a wish to view it before making a decision.

Yours faithfully,

GUY PHELPS
Centre for Mass Communication
Research, Leicester

Hyacinthe Goujon

SIR,—In his well-known account of life in Paris between the wars, Elliot Paul makes the central heroine of *A Narrow Street* (U.S. title: *The Last Time I Saw Paris*), the young actress Hyacinthe Goujon. In the late 1930s, under another name, she began a promising career in French films that was cut short by her tragic death in 1940, when the French press declared her loss to be 'a severe blow to the French cinema' of that time.

Can anyone tell me the professional name she used and the titles of any films in which she appeared?

Yours faithfully,
DAVID GUNSTON

Lawnwood,
Denmead,
Portsmouth,
Hampshire.

Akhenaten

SIR,—May I add to the interesting article of Nigel Andrews about the struggles of our friend Shadi Abdelsalam to shoot his second long film *Akhenaten* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1973), that his beautiful film *Night of Counting the Years* won the Georges Sadoul Prize and that it was chiefly Jean Rouch, Ruta Sadoul and myself who fought for this film. Langlois showed it at the Cinémathèque, as you did at the National Film Theatre. Two interesting costume sketches by Shadi Abdelsalam are exhibited in the Musée du Cinéma at the Palais de Chaillot; his short film *The Eloquent Peasant* won the Fipresci Prize in Venice, and even the Israeli member voted for it.

Akhenaten, called Amenophis IV in Germany, was still more *en vogue* in Berlin than Tutenkhamun is now in Europe. For when the town of Amenophis was 'buried' after the early death of this rebel Pharaoh, the priests also buried the workshop of Amenophis'

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favourite sculptor. It was excavated by German archaeologists and everything was still there untouched, tools and everything as well as sculptured portraits of the Pharaoh and the princesses his daughters, executed in a wonderfully lively, sketchy manner.

Now this Amenophis vogue may be forgotten in Germany. But what about an Egyptian-German co-production which would help Shadi Abdelsalam to make his dream come true? India once did not help Satyajit Ray and did not even want to send his film *Pather Panchali* to Cannes—now India is proud of Ray! And in Iran they do not seem to know what *The Cow* and *The Postman* mean to our audiences. Why do governments never seem to understand their own advantages and prefer 'official', conventional films?

But we need not think of far off countries alone. Why didn't *Fat City* get any Oscar?

Yours faithfully,
LOTTE H. EISNER

Neuilly-sur-Seine.

Karl Brown

The autobiography by Karl Brown, *Adventures with D. W. Griffith*, from which an extract was published in the Summer 1973 issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, is to be published in Great Britain by Secker and Warburg. The American publisher is Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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COLUMBIA-WARNER for *The King of Marvin Gardens*.
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BRITISH LION for *Don't Look Now*, *A Doll's House*.
CONNOISSEUR FILMS for *Les Noces Rouges*.
CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *Before the Revolution*.
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KARIN THOME for *Overnight*.
NICHOLAS RAY for *We Can't Go Home Again*.
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THE LATENT IMAGE for *The Crazies*.
NICOLETTA ZALAFFI for photographs of Marco Bellocchio, Jean-Pierre Melville.
DANISH FILM MUSEUM for *Hamlet*, *Engelien*, *Liebes ABC*, *Der Absturz*, *Erdegeist*, *Zapatas Bande*.
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BFI NEWS for photograph of Olwen Vaughan.
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FRENZY

BRITISH (1972). AN ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRODUCTION for UNIVERSAL PICTURES. Produced and Directed by ALFRED HITCHCOCK. Screenplay: ANTHONY SHAFFER; Based on the Novel *GOODBYE PICCADILLY, FAREWELL LEICESTER SQUARE* by ARTHUR LA BERN. Photography: GIL TAYLOR. Special Photographic Effects: ALBERT WHITLOCK. Music Composed and Conducted by RON GOODWIN. Editor: JOHN JYMPSON. Production Designer: SYDNEY CAIN. Art Direction: ROBERT LAING. Set Decorations: SIMON WAKEFIELD. Sound: PETER HANDFORD, GORDON K. McCALLUM and RUSTY COPPLEMAN. Wardrobe: DULCIE MIDWINTER. Makeup: HARRY FRAMPTON. Hairstyles: PAT McDERMOTT. Assoc. Producer: WILLIAM HILL. Production Manager: BRIAN BURGESS. Asst. to Mr. Hitchcock: PEGGY ROBERTSON. Asst. Director: COLIN M. BREWER. Location scenes filmed in London; Interiors at Pinewood Studios. Technicolor. 116 Mins. [R].

Synopsis

As a Parliament official lectures on pollution, the nude body of a woman floats down the Thames — the striped tie knotted around her neck indicating she is the latest victim of London's notorious necktie strangler. Nearby, an embittered and down-and-out former RAF pilot named Richard Blaney indignantly quits his bartender job when the pub owner accuses him of cadging drinks. Storming off, Blaney pauses to chat with his friend Bob Rusk, a Covent Garden fruit and vegetable dealer, and then drops in at the matrimonial agency run by his ex-wife Brenda. Unable to curb his angry frustration, Blaney lashes out at the patiently enduring woman with such fury that his invectives carry to the outer office of secretary Monica Barling. The next day, Rusk shows up at Brenda's office;



FOSTER and LEIGH-HUNT

Rusk. Shortly after ushering Babs into his flat, Rusk wheels out a potato sack and loads it in a vegetable truck.

Richard Blaney JON FINCH
Inspector Oxford ALEC McCOWEN
Bob Rusk BARRY FOSTER
Brenda Blaney BARBARA LEIGH-HUNT
Babs Milligan ANNA MASSEY
Mrs. Oxford VIVIEN MERCHANT
Hetty Porter BILLIE WHITELAW
Felix Forsythe BERNARD CRIBBINS
Johnny Porter CLIVE SWIFT
Sergeant Spearman MICHAEL BATES
and

Monica Barling: JEAN MARSH. Bob's Mother: RITA WEBB. Hall Porter: JIMMY GARDNER. Porter's Wife: ELSIE RANDOLPH. Mrs. Davison: MADGE RYAN. Mr. Salt: GEORGE TOVEY. Pub Customers: NOEL JOHNSON and GERALD SIM. Sir George: JOHN BOXER. Barmaid: JUNE ELLIS. Barman: BUNNY MAY. Hospital Patient: ROBERT KEEGAN. Man in Bowler Hat on Waterfront: ALFRED HITCHCOCK.

having had dealings with him before, Brenda bluntly states she is unable to accommodate his "peculiar" tastes in women and would prefer he took his business elsewhere. Instead of leaving, Rusk forces the terrified woman into a chair, rapes her while she recites the 93rd psalm, and then strangles her with his necktie. Because Blaney later returns to the locked office, and is spotted from the street by Monica Barling, a warrant for his arrest is issued by Scotland Yard's Inspector Oxford. Blaney learns of his predicament while staying at a hotel with Babs Milligan, a co-worker at the pub. Upon reading his description in a morning paper, Blaney flees with Babs and takes refuge with a war buddy named Johnny Porter. Babs, on the other hand, makes the terrible mistake of accepting a night's shelter from

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FILM GUIDE

BADGE 373 (CIC)

Gun-running, Puerto Rican revolutionaries, and a tough, foul-mouthed and universally malevolent New York cop who shoots first and asks no questions. Nor does the film, a souped-up, second-hand model of *The French Connection*, nasty, violent and humourless. (Robert Duvall, Verna Bloom, Henry Darrow; director, Howard W. Koch.)

BLACULA (Columbia-Warner)

Conveyor-belt horror film which dies of exhausted invention after having hit (if that is the word) on the idea of turning Dracula black. Grisly in all departments, although Vnette McGee makes a charming heroine. (William Marshall, Thalmus Rasulala; director, William Crain.)

CESAR AND ROSALIE (Gala)

Love Story French-style. Excellent performances by Yves Montand, Romy Schneider and Sami Frey as the bourgeois triangle trying hard to find some way, civilised or uncivilised, out of a sexual impasse. Unfortunately the antiseptic scent of *Lelouch* hangs over its prettily packaged agonising. (Director, Claude Sautet.)

*CHARLEY VARRICK (CIC)

Superbly enjoyable thriller with Walter Matthau as a small-time bank robber who finds he has robbed the Mafia, suffers a moment of gloom, and then cheerfully begins playing both ends against the middle. Don Siegel at the top of his form, making a pure Forties film noir which at the same time gently sends itself up. (Joe Don Baker, Andy Robinson, Sheree North.) Reviewed.

CHILD'S PLAY (CIC)

Oddly misconceived adaptation of a stage play about satanic doings in a Catholic boarding-school for boys. The sound of brooding terror is drowned by the creaking of both plot and—with the honourable exception of James Mason—performances. (Robert Preston, Beau Bridges; director, Sidney Lumet.)

**DAY FOR NIGHT (Columbia-Warner)

Truffaut at his brilliant best, employing a film-within-a-film structure and an international cast to combine an unsentimental love letter to the big studio system with an affectionately ironic statement about the links between art and ego. A masterly tightrope stretched between laughter and tears, emotion and intelligence. (Jean-Pierre L aud, Jacqueline Bisset, Val ria Cortese.)

**DOLL'S HOUSE, A (British Lion)

Admirably abetted by David Mercer's intelligent adaptation, Losey gives Ibsen's rather stuffily well made play the airing it deserves, sending Jane Fonda scurrying through Norwegian town and countryside in quest of Nora's uncertain liberation, and confining even the more topical of the drama's timeless themes within a convincingly recreated Victorian setting. (David Warner, Edward Fox, Delphine Seyrig.) Reviewed.

**DON'T LOOK NOW (British Lion)

Stunningly exact, intricate and echoing Nicolas Roeg film which forms, with *Performance* and *Walkabout*, the third panel of a triptych on the mysterious influences behind human perception. Not quite a ghost story—it's both more and less—about a young couple who get vibrations about their dead child from two weird sisters and can't stop the escalation into terror. (Donald Sutherland, Julie Christie.) Reviewed.

**EFFECT OF GAMMA RAYS ON MAN-IN-THE-MOON MARIGOLDS, THE (Fox-Rank)

Virtuoso performance by Joanne Woodward as a run-down, middle-aged mother regretting the past and working off her present fantasies on her two teenage daughters. Offbeat variations on the theme of embarrassment; Paul Newman's subdued direction just stops it tipping over into the merely embarrassing. (Nell Potts, Roberta Wallach.) Reviewed.

*EMPEROR OF THE NORTH (Fox-Rank)

Short on Depression atmosphere but strong on the finer points of oneupmanship as hobo Lee Marvin challenges railwayman Ernest Borgnine to a deadly duel, with a free ride on the latter's train as the stake. Quite entertaining, even though the script has no place to go but brutality. (Keith Carradine; director, Robert Aldrich.)

FINAL PROGRAMME, THE (MGM-EMI)

Clumsy and almost incomprehensible sci-fi fantasy about scientists trying to breed a hermaphrodite messiah as the end of the world draws nigh. Jon Finch's careless, unendearing performance as 'the new kind of hero' (a cynical blend of Bond and Hannay) only helps the jokes to misfire. (Jenny Runacre, Sterling Hayden, Hugh Griffith; director, Robert Fuest.)

*HEAVY TRAFFIC (Black Ink)

Ralph Bakshi revisits the scenes and themes of *Fritz the Cat*, though without the disciplined vision of Robert Crumb his eclectic targets and the combination of animation and live-action sequences sometimes look more like a multiple pile-up than an anarchistic explosion. A bit of a curate's egg, its blue-black humour is still wildly funny in parts.

*HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER (CIC)

Highly allegorical Western, in the Sergio Leone mould, from Clint Eastwood, a slow and sombre tale about a dead lawman's vengeful visitation on the town which did him wrong. Ritualised violence and plodding symbolism make for heavy going, though the brooding intensity exerts some kind of grip. (Clint Eastwood, Verna Bloom, Mariana Hill.)

**HIRELING, THE (Columbia-Warner)

L. P. Hartley's novel about a bull-headed chauffeur and his impossible infatuation with a neurotic aristocrat whose need for contact he mistakes for attraction. Finely acted and intelligently directed study of the disaster area between the English social classes; a pity that the theme, once established, only admits of progressively predictable variations. (Robert Shaw, Sarah Miles; director, Alan Bridges.)

**INVITATION, THE (Commoisseur)

Retired office worker invites his former colleagues to his country estate for a treat, and then watches the sorry disintegration of this afternoon outing. Tellingly quiet and observant direction by Claude

Goretta, in what is becoming recognisable as the Swiss style. (Jean-Luc Bideau, Jean Champion, Pierre Collet.)

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR (CIC)

Tim Rice's restless, multi-decibel rock opera blown up to *King of Kings* proportions by Norman Jewison, whose spectacular production values rather kill the spontaneity. Fine, Fosse-type choreography by Rob Iscove, and good moments when Judas Iscariot (Carl Anderson) and King Herod (Joshua Mostel) are around, but Ted Neeley's Jesus is far too tetchy. (Yvonne Elliman, Barry Dennen.)

**KING OF MARVIN GARDENS, THE (Columbia-Warner)

A stunning tour of the Monopoly board, with a bleakly deserted Atlantic City providing the base from which two brothers and their incestuous m nage work through an infinity of ambivalent relationships while dreaming of building hotels in a Hawaiian island paradise. Brilliant script, magic performances, first-rate photography (Kovacs). (Jack Nicholson, Bruce Dern, Ellen Burstyn.) Reviewed.

**LAST AMERICAN HERO, THE (Fox-Rank)

Engaging bio-pic of Junior Jackson, stock-car racing star and folksy hero from a family of mountain moonshiners (excellent performance by Jeff Bridges). Sticking sensibly to the early days, it has something of *Downhill Racer*'s elliptical charm and quizzical characterisation, even though the script occasionally betrays rhetorical tendencies. (Geraldine Fitzgerald; director, Lamont Johnson.)

*LAST OF SHEILA, THE (Columbia-Warner)

Murder mystery with Agatha Christie pretensions as a glossy, seven-star cast play homicidal party games aboard James Coburn's luxury yacht. Old-fashioned, contrived and unbelievably convoluted, but spasmodically entertaining and pushed along by the professionalism of James Mason and Joan Hackett. (Richard Benjamin, Dyan Cannon, Ian McShane, Raquel Welch; director, Herbert Ross.)

*LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL (Columbia-Warner)

The High Fifties revisited, via an all-star rock 'n' roll concert intercut with newsreel of the day before yesterday. A pop art collage of nostalgia, bursting with reference points for ageing fans and budding sociologists. (Chuck Berry, Little Richard, etc.; directors, Sid Levin, Robert Abel.)

LIVE AND LET DIE (United Artists)

A new style for a new Bond, which only goes to show that the old Bond was best. Short on mechanics, shorter on charm, the formula looks shop-worn and too anxious to outbid the competition. As crisply shot and edited as ever, but the flavour of expensive spontaneity is sadly missing. (Roger Moore, Yaphet Kotto, Jane Seymour; director, Guy Hamilton.)

**LONG GOODBYE, THE (United Artists)

Robert Altman plays Philip Marlowe for a sucker, adapting Chandler's finest novel to demonstrate that the old private eye is another displaced person of the 1970s. Visually stimulating; but Altman's fragmentation bomb blows up itself rather than the myths he has said he wants to lay to rest. (Elliott Gould, Sterling Hayden, Nina Van Pallandt.)

*NEST OF GENTLEFOLK, A (Contemporary)

Moody adaptation of Turgenev's story about a nobleman revisiting his past and finding the present elusive amid the decaying grandeur of his country estate. Finely wrought sense of time standing still, but the insistent lyricism is finally monotonous. (Leonid Kulagin, Beata Tyszkiewicz, Irina Kupchenko; director, Andrei Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky.)

**NOCES ROUGES, LES (Commoisseur)

Latest and apparently last of Chabrol's French provincial murder cases, set in Val n ay and involving two killings among husbands and wives of the local bourgeoisie. A totally confident picture, precise as a watch mechanism and full of stinging sharp insights. (Michel Piccoli, St phane Audran, Claude Pi lu.) Reviewed.

*PAPER MOON (CIC)

Bogdanovich returns to black-and-white nostalgia, combining the central ploys of *Elmer Gantry* and *Bonnie and Clyde* as he sends a middle-aged Bible salesman and a precocious nine-year-old orphan bumping in an old jalopy over a still Depressed Midwest. Accomplished performances (Ryan O'Neal and his real-life daughter) and witty repart e don't entirely camouflage the cuteness. (Madeleine Kahn, John Hillerman.)

**PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID (MGM-EMI)

Peckinpah revisits the familiar territory of the making and breaking of Western myths. Ravaged by cuts, but still surviving as more powerful than his recent films and visually magnificent. A sombre, intense, downbeat essay on the truth behind the legend and the legend behind the truth. (James Coburn, Kris Kristofferson.) Reviewed.

SCORPIO (United Artists)

Vacuously slick spy thriller, given what life it has by Burt Lancaster and Paul Scofield as the Cold War stalwarts drawn together from opposite ideologies—there were ideals then—when confronted by today's mercenary killer mentality. Otherwise strictly zoom and thump. (Alain Delon; director, Michael Winner.)

**STATE OF SIEGE (Hemdale)

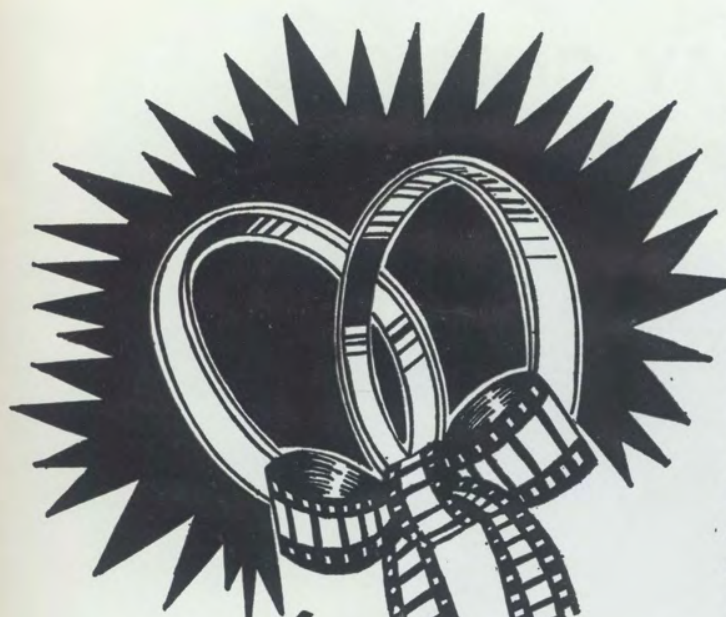
Another political reconstruction from Costa-Gavras, this time about the kidnapping and eventual execution of an American 'adviser' by the Tupamaros. Fascinating in its gradual unmasking of a political villain; but doubts persist about the general context and the particular timing. (Yves Montand, Renato Salvatori, O. E. Hasse.) Reviewed.

**TIS PITY SHE'S A WHORE (Miracle)

Despite John Ford's text being pared to the bone (and flatly dubbed in English), Patroni Griffi achieves a gusty Jacobean flavour of blood and guts, tempered by exquisite colour photography and strangely beautiful designs to enclose the turbulent passions. (Charlotte Rampling, Oliver Tobias.) Reviewed.

*VISIONS OF EIGHT (MGM-EMI)

Eight directors in search of the Munich Olympics. Disappointing in view of the status of the contributors (Penn, Schlesinger, Forman, Ichikawa) that the general impression is of limbering-up exercises, and in Forman's case a vulgar taking-off spree, rather than the powerfully personal, idiosyncratic view.



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